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VOL. II

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MYSTERIES 1332
OF THE
COURT OF LONDON



BY

George W. M. REYNOLDS.

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Post Box No. 167, MADRAS, E.

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BY
G. W. M. REYNOLDS

Caroline of Brunswick
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NEW EDITION.

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THE MYSTERIES

CHAPTER LIII.

THE MYSTERIES OF OLD PAINTINGS.

IN the times whereof we are writing, the house which stood next to Newgate, in the street that borrows its name from the prison was occupied by a picture dealer. This house was about fifteen feet higher than the gaol; and a person might easily let himself down from the roof of the former to the leads of the latter.

The picture-dealer was a man considerably advanced in years: or, to speak more accurately, he was verging upon sixty-five. He was a widower—had no children—and, being excessively parsimonious, kept but a small establishment in the shape of domestics. An old woman performed the duties of housekeeper, cook, and maid-of-all-work: a slipshod, hungry-looking boy attended in the shop when his master was otherwise engaged;—and the third floor was occupied by an artist whom the picture-dealer retained constantly in his employment for purposes which will almost immediately transpire.

Mr. Shrubsole—for that was the euphonious name of the picture-dealer—was a tall, thin man, with a pale countenance, a bald head fringed with white hair, and large eyes of that dull hue which, being a mixture of light gray and green, gave them the appearance of having been boiled. His mouth had fallen in, because he had not a single tooth left in his head; and his nose being particularly pointed, the outlines of his profile were sharp and angular. His attire was a seedy suit of black, which age and dirt had rendered rusty and brown; and he usually wore an apron dingy in hue and smeared with paint and varnish, and a massive pair of silver spectacles, with large circular glasses, to his countenance, and huge buckles of the same metal to his shoes, and you have before you a complete portraiture of Mr. Shrubsole.

His shop was narrow, but high and airy. The windows were very seldom open—the floor never; and the walls were as black as a ceiling that had never been white, well could be. The picture-dealer was always involved in a semi-darkness, even in the most glorious day: but in the winter time he was particularly sombre. This, however, the old man was wont to counteract as the very best light in the establishment judges and connoisseurs

could possibly wish to view paintings; and when evening came, or a fog prevailed in the City, he would distribute half a dozen wretched candles, twenty to the pound, about the shop, and then vow that it was a perfect illumination.

Notwithstanding the sordid appearance of the shop itself, it contained a great number of paintings. All the different Schools, whether ancient or modern, were represented in that congress of pictures: and it seemed as if all imaginable subjects and branches of the art had exercised the right of universal suffrage to send suitable members to that assembly. Portraits, landscapes, naval and military battles, river scenes, animals, flowers, cities, ruins, angels, devils, historical and religious designs,—in a word, every description of subject might be viewed and selected in Mr. Shrubsole's "Gallery of Art." And if the visitor were not satisfied with what he beheld on the ground floor, he was escorted to the first and second storeys, all the rooms of which were likewise filled with pictures.

Any individual who was not somewhat initiated in the mysteries of Mr. Shrubsole's trade, would have fancied that he possessed the finest collection of paintings in all the world, and that he must be a man of enormous wealth. For Raphaels, Michael Angelos, Correggios, Titians, Guidos, Rembrandts, Vandykes, Claudes, Poussins, Murillos, Hogarths, &c., were as plentiful in Mr. Shrubsole's establishment as blackberries on any hedge in England at the proper season.

We shall presently ascertain how it was that Mr. Shrubsole became possessed of such splendid pictures, all by the great masters: but before we enter more profoundly into the mysteries of his trade, we must observe that at the farther end of the shop, and in the very darkest nook, there hung in a massive frame a piece of canvass painted all over a very dark and dingy brown, unrelieved by a single shade or outline indicative of a picture.

It was mid-day; and Mr. Shrubsole was in his shop, surveying the various masterpieces with an ineffable complacency,—while the boy was getting his dinner behind a Vandyke that was leaning against the wall.

Presently a short, stout, elderly, pragmatical gentleman entered the establishment; and, tapping the ferule of his gold-headed cane sharply upon the floor he said, "A friend of mine

has placed your catalogue in my hands; and I have come to see the pictures accordingly. But mind—I'm a tolerable good judge, I flatter myself—and I shall very soon discover whether they are the originals or only copies."

"If you find any copies here sir," responded Shrubsole, "I'll eat 'em."

"Well—you can say nothing fairer," observed the gentleman, taking the picture-dealer's answer very seriously: and placing himself in an attentive attitude, he began to survey the large painting behind which the boy was devouring a sausage and slice of bread.

"Splendid altar piece, that!" said Mr. Shrubsole, after a pause. "The great master's hand visible in every tint—characteristic brilliancy of style—splendour and richness of colouring, eh? Look at that Saint in the foreground—he literally seems to stand out of the canvass."

Still the elderly gentleman made no reply—but kept his looks intently fixed upon the painting, just for all the world as if he were criticising it most minutely. But Mr. Shrubsole had already seen through him as completely as if his entire form were made of glass: and the wily old fellow knew that his customer was one of those self-sufficient, conceited, and purse-proud individuals who affect to be connoisseurs in an art of which they are utterly ignorant.

"That masterpiece," continued Shrubsole, "was painted by Vandyke for the Cathedral at Genoa. There it remained until three years ago, when a new altar was erected: and the picture was sold for a thousand guineas to a Genoese nobleman. The nobleman sent it as a present to King George III; but his Majesty not admiring Catholic subjects, gave it to my Lord Skimmington. His lordship gave it to his mistress, Signora Borlini, the famous singer; and she, being in want of cash the other day, sold it to me. I can let it go for five hundred—and that is dirt cheap."

"It is not dear, Mr. Shrubsole, I admit," said the elderly gentleman, at last breaking silence and turning slowly round with a very knowing air. "No—it is not dear. It's real Vandyke—you couldn't deceive me if it wasn't, I can tell you. It is certainly a splendid thing. The Saint, as you say, in the foreground is admirable; he seems to be absolutely walking into the background. Ah! you perceive I'm rather a good judge! of pictures—eh?" added

the elderly gentleman, with a knowing wink of the left eye.

"I was certain of that, sir, the very first moment you began to look at my Vandyke," said Mr. Shrubsole. "You surveyed it with the air and manner of a connoisseur."

"Well—I think I *do* know a good picture when I see one," returned the elderly gentleman, highly delighted at the compliment paid him. "Come—I don't mind saying four hundred guineas for the Vandyke—cheque at sight."

"I couldn't do it, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Shrubsole: then, in a milder tone, he added, "No—I couldn't do it, really—much as I like dealing with any gentleman who knows how to value and appreciate fine paintings—as *you* do, sir."

"Well, well—I see I must not beat you down too much," resumed the customer still more highly flattered by this last appeal to his vanity. "Let us say four hundred and fifty—and then, perhaps, I may be induced to purchase another picture before I leave the shop."

"On those conditions we can agree," said Mr. Shrubsole.

"Good!" ejaculated the pragmatical gentleman while the ferule of his stick again rang sharply on the floor. "Now let me examine some more of this really fine collection. Have you a good Rembrandt?"

"Behold!" said the picture-dealer, pointing to a portrait of a Delilah, which was almost a mass of black with a vivid streak of light stretching from the upper corner on the left hand, and ceasing at the lady's nose; one side of which it perfectly irradiated, while the other was a dark as if it had never been painted at all.

"Fine—very fine—splendid effect!" exclaimed the elderly gentleman, after a long scrutiny and an equally protracted silence. "Wonderful!"

"—sublime creation! But I heard—in fact I know that there are Rembrandts in which the light is so vividly portrayed. For my part, Mr. Shrubsole," he added remarkably knowing air, "dark pictures are the finest specimens of old masters. I mean, you know," he continued pompously, "of the magnificent works in which there is—ahem!—so deep and the—so—ahem!—so solemn and ang in their obscurity, that to the un-
informed eye the whole picture is nothing more or less than a

mass,—whereas *we*, Mr. Shrubsole—*we*, who are connoisseurs, can soon distinguish the fine portrait like an angelic countenance peeping forth from the midst of a night intensely dark.”

“Ah! my dear sir,” exclaimed the picture-dealer, throwing into his hat-chet-face as warm an expression of rapture as such mummy-features could possibly assume: “you do indeed enjoy an intimate acquaintance with peculiarities of style and the sublime characteristics which distinguished the old masters. You are an enthusiast—like me! Come, then, my dear sir—come—and feast your eyes upon the most magnificent specimen of the art which the immortal Rembrandt has left behind him!”

“Is it possible that you possess such a specimen?” exclaimed the elderly gentleman, working himself up into a perfect fit of enthusiasm.

“I do indeed, sir,” responded Shrubsole: and, lighting a miserable candle he led the way to the extremity of the shop. “There sir—there, brother connoisseur!” he ejaculated, in a tone of triumph, and pointing to the canvass which we have already described as being painted all over a very dark and dingy brown, and not having the slightest trace of any picture at all.

The elderly gentleman planted himself at what he conceived to be a proper distance in order to view the magnificent work of art; and a feeling of profound respect and veneration came over him as he fixed his eyes on the canvass. His countenance assumed a very solemn expression; and he gazed long intently—and silently. As a matter of course he could distinguish nothing: all was a dark and obscure void;—but not for worlds would he have compromised his reputation as a connoisseur by turning round to the picture-dealer and frankly exclaiming, “May I be hanged if I can trace a single thing or discover a single outline!”

“You have placed yourself in an admirable position to see it to advantage,” said Mr. Shrubsole, taking his own stand near the frame which enclosed the daub, and holding the candle high up. “There! now you catch the light upon the countenance. Does it not appear gradually to reveal itself to you, like a person emerging slowly from the mouth of a dark cavern? Now you begin to see the richness of the colouring—mark the life-like effect with which the cheeks are painted—behold the expression of those speaking eyes!

Ah! now the light falls on the nose—and you catch the perfect outline of the profile! some people—clever men too,—have declared that the picture is trifle more sombre than it ought to be: but you and I, sir, know better. *You* at least can appreciate the beauty—the excellence—the magnificence of this inimitable painting.”

“Yes—it is indeed wonderful!” observed the elderly gentleman, shaking his head solemnly, but at the same time fruitlessly straining his eyes to catch even the remotest glimpse of a single one of all the features which the picture dealer had enumerated: and, for the life of him, he could not conceive what on earth the subject of the painting might be.

But he dared not ask a question—he dared not suffer it to appear that he was in a state of complete mental obfuscation: for if he seemed even for a single moment to be in the dark concerning that picture—as indeed he most assuredly was—his reputation as a connoisseur would be destroyed for ever. Vainly did he torture his imagination to persuade itself that he really did see something; no—the canvass was an awful void, or rather a mass of unvaried darkness save where the glimmer of the farthing candle flickered upon it;—and yet Mr. Shrubsole said it *was* a picture—and gazed upon it as if it were—and therefore a picture, thought the elderly gentleman, it certainly must be!”

“Well, my dear sir—are you not delighted—are you not enraptured?” exclaimed Mr. Shrubsole, after another long and solemn silence. “Do you not feel an enthusiasm glowing in your veins?—do you not experience a sensation as if you could fall down and worship that masterpiece of the immortal Rembrandt? Ah! my dear sir, to a connoisseur like you this is indeed the richest of treats—far, far exceeding the most luxurious banquet!”

“I Confess that I am lost—bewildered—confused—astounded,” said the elderly gentleman—and most assuredly he was. “I mean—I am amazed by the magnificence——”

“Oh! I can comprehend your feelings, my dear sir,” interrupted the picture-dealer. “Do you not long to become the owner of this treasure?”

“What is the sum?” demanded the elderly gentleman: for he felt convinced that if he could make nothing of the subject of the painting, his

family and friends would be equally in the dark—and he knew that his reputation as a connoisseur would rise to the very zenith by the mere fact of possessing a picture of such extraordinary merit that no one could understand it!

"Alas! my dear sir," said Mr. Shrubsole, forcing himself to have a profound sigh,—“the badness of the times—the flatness of business—the state of the Money-Market—all combine to induce me to part with my Rembrandt for a mere song. Five hundred guineas—not a farthing less—and even then it will cost me a pang to lose my Rembrandt!”

"Five hundred guineas you shall have," said the elderly gentleman, emphatically. "It would be a desecration and a sacrilege to attempt to beat you down. But of course—that is, my dear sir—I suppose," added the customer, with a slight embarrassment in his tone and manner,—“you can get a paragraph inserted in the newspapers to the effect—ahem!—that your most valuable Vandyke and your Rembrandt masterpiece have been purchased—ahem!—for a large sum by—ahem!—that liberal amateur and well-known connoisseur, Sir Brinksby Bull."

"What! is it indeed the famous Slinksby Pull who has thus honoured my Gallery by his presence?" cried the old picture-dealer, affecting to survey his customer with the deepest reverence mingled with admiration: although, to tell the truth, he had never in his life heard the name before, and had even now caught it so imperfectly that he made a sad mess of the euphonious nomenclature when attempting to repeat it, "Then I am glad that my two best paintings have fallen to the possession of one who will know how to value them. My dear sir," he continued, "you have acquired perfect treasures this day. The pictures shall be dusted and cleaned, and sent to your mansion in the course of the week."

"Very good, Mr. Shrubsole!" exclaimed the elderly gentleman, who was a retired grocer and having been mayor of some town when the corporation thereof presented an address to the King had received the *honour* of Kingthhood—since which occurrence he had settled, with Lady Brinksby Bull and all the little Brinksby Bulls, in a Square at the West End of London, where he gave grand parties and set himself up as a patron of the fine arts: although, as the reader may very well

conceive, he was a much better judge of muscovado than of pictures.

However, Sir Brinksby wrote a check for nine hundred and fifty guineas—left his address—and strode pompously away, thinking how he should astonish all his friends and aristocratic acquaintances with his magnificent Rembrandt.

The moment the Knight's back was turned, Mr. Shrubsole rubbed his hands smartly together, and chuckled in a low mumbling tone, as old gentlemen are wont to do when they are hugely delighted; and having thus demonstrated his satisfaction, he exclaimed, "Now, Tom—where are you?"

"Here, sir," said a short, pale, thin, and dirty looking urchin, as he emerged from behind the great picture.

"You must mind the shop for a little while," continued his master. "And remember, if any one comes in, this portrait is Admiral Drake," he added, pointing to a bluff-looking naval officer, with a small cocked hat perched on the top of a large wig.

"Why, sir—I thought he was Van Trump," exclaimed the day,

"Van Tromp you mean!" cried Mr. Shrubsole. "Well—he has been Van Trump for the last three weeks—and no one will buy a Dutch Admiral. So we must see whether the public can be tempted with an English one. And this portrait," continued the picture-dealer, pointing to a military commander, "has been Prince Eugene long enough. No one cares a curse about Prince Eugene. Let him be the Duke of Marlborough. Have we got a Marquis of Granby?"

"The last that Mr. Woodfall painted, sir, was sold yesterday," answered the boy.

"Well—this Marshal Turenne must be a Granby, then, in case anybody wants one. And while I think of it, Tom," added Mr. Shrubsole, "That Rubens in the window there had better be a Titian; and this picture which Mr. Woodfall painted last week, and which we basked yesterday, must be a Michael Angelo. Now, shall you remember all these instructions?"

"To be sure I shall, sir," returned the lad, with a knowing leer.

"Well—I've done a good afternoon's business—and here's a penny for you," said Mr. Shrubsole, placing the copper coin as carefully in the boy's hand as if it were a guinea, which he was fearful might drop and roll between the boards.

Having thus given the poor half starved wretch a proof of his liberality,

the picture-dealer ascended several flights of narrow, dark, and dilapidated stairs, and ultimately reached the third floor. There he entered a front room in which several pictures, resting on their easels, were distributed about. These works of art were in various stages towards completion; and their subjects were as varied and their respective style as different as those which were displayed for sale in the shop and apartments beneath. In fact it was in this room that Mr. Shrubsole's Raphaels, Michael Angelos, Correggios, Titians, Guidos, Rembrandts, Vandykes, Claudes, Poussians, Murillos, and Hogarths were composed and manufactured: and from that sordid looking studio flowed the stream of "masterpieces" that supplied the picture galleries of the aristocratic and wealthy class throughout England.

And who was the artist that combined in his own person a glimmering reflection of the talents of all those great masters? The reader may perhaps suspect that the paintings were the veriest daubs in the universe: but such indeed they were not. On the contrary, they evinced immense skill, a profound acquaintance with the style of those originals of which they were imitations, and no small experience in producing fine effects. In a word, genius was stamped upon each and all: and if that genius were far inferior to the assemblage of models which it kept in view, it was nevertheless of no common order.

In the workshop, or studio, which we have just seen Mr. Shrubsole enter, a young man was busily employed with his palette and brushes. He was tall—thin—but symmetrical in proportions, and of a genteel appearance. His countenance was pale, without being absolutely sickly: and his large dark eyes flashed with the fire of genius. Coal black hair, silk and glossy as that of a woman, curled naturally above the high, noble, and intellectual forehead over which it was parted; and his whiskers, of the same jetty dye, met beneath his chin, the oval countenance thus being framed in ebony. His delicately pencilled brows were finely arched: he had the short and slightly curved upper lip which denoted a haughty disposition:—and his teeth were remarkably white and even. His toilette was plain, and even homely but his linen was perfectly clean, his boots well blacked, and his clothes carefully brushed. When at

work, he wore an apron, which reached half-way up his chest, and altogether his appearance was so neat and interesting that it not only contrasted strongly with the miserable aspect of the apartment, but was also widely different from the slovenliness and neglect which usually characterise men of that profession.

This young artist, whose age was certainly not more than five-and-twenty, was named George Woodfall; and he it was who, for a remuneration ridiculously moderate, touched up and altered the old pictures which his employer bought at sales and elsewhere, and likewise painted new ones. In fact, he was the author of the Michael Angelos, Rembrandts, and other "masterpieces" which Mr. Shrubsole disposed of as originals, and for which he obtained large sums.

"Well, my dear George," said the picture-dealer, as he entered the room: "hard at work—eh? Nothing like it—nothing like it! I have just sold the Vandyke—the Saints, you know? Let me see: that painting I bought at a sale in Wardour Street—and then you touched it up."

"Touched it up!" exclaimed the young man indignantly: "I made it what it is—I converted it from a vile daub into something which at all events, you have managed to pass off as a Vandyke. But how much did you obtain for it?" he asked, in a milder tone.

"A mere trifle—forty guineas," answered Shrubsole, telling this great falsehood without a blush and without the quivering of a muscle of his countenance. "I shall add half-a-guinea to your wages on Saturday night: I can't do more, as times go."

"Wages!—do you look upon me as a servant?" cried Woodfall, grinding his teeth. "Call it pittance—stipend—income—salary—anything you choose; but not wages!"

"Well—well—I didn't mean to offend you, George," said the picture-dealer, trembling at the young man's excitement. "But I have something else to inform you this afternoon. I've sold a Rembrandt."

"Which?" demanded Woodfall.

"Whichever you like to make it," responded Mr. Shrubsole, with a chuckling laugh.

"Ah! I see—you have been playing off the black canvass on the imagination of some simpleton," observed the young man. "Well—I can scarcely

blame you. The world are so vain and conceited that they deserve to be taken in. Sooner than confess themselves ignorant, they will affect to see a picture where no picture exists. Oh! the contemptible fools—the drivelling idiots!"

"Come—don't excite yourself on that account, my dear young friend," said Mr. Shrubsole, laying his long, lean, withered hand upon the shoulder of the tall, graceful young man.

"Not I indeed," exclaimed Woodfall, with a contemptuous curl of the lip: these miserable *ignorami* are not worth a sneer. But how much did you get from your customer by persuading him into the belief that a dark canvass was a splendid painting!"

A trifle—a mere trifle—thirty guineas," responded Shrubsole, telling lie the second. But I shall add *another* half guinea to your wa—salary," he cried, hastily correcting himself, "next Saturday night. Come—you must paint in a female Saint or some such thing on the dark canvass; a quarter of an hour in the even will then give it a few cracks all over, and bestow an *ancient appearance* on it;—and perhaps we shall use a little meguelp or turpentine to subdue the freshness of the colouring, and make it look a *leetle* black and dirty."

"I will go down and fetch up the canvass at once," said Woodfall.

"Eh! that's a dear good young man. Lose no time about it. I'll just look at the pictures you've been working on to-day, till you come up again."

And while Mr. Shrubsole turned towards the partially finished paintings on their easels, the talented artist descended into the shop.

"Tom," he said, immediately accosting the boy, into whose hand he slipped a shilling; "how much did your master receive for that Vandyke?"

"Four hundred and fifty guineas, sir," was the reply.

"And for the pretended Rembrandt?" was Woodfall's next query.

"Five hundred guineas, sir," answered the lad.

"Thank you, Tom: you are a good boy—a very good boy," observed the artist, in a low and hurried tone—for he was afraid of being overheard by the picture-dealer. "And who was the purchaser?"

"Sir Brinksby Bull," returned Tom.

George Woodfall drew forth his pocket-book—made a few hasty memoranda—and then proceeded to

carry the daubed canvass up to his workshop on the third floor.

By nine o'clock in the evening the outlines of a heavenly face had been sketched on that canvass; for the young artist worked unweariedly until the old female domestic called him to supper. This meal was served in the kitchen; and on the present occasion it was somewhat more bounteous in quantity and inviting in quality than usual—for the picture-dealer was slightly moved to liberality by the good business he had done that day.

After supper Mr. Shrubsole despatched the servant to the nearest tavern for two bottles of wine; and the party—consisting of the picture-dealer himself, the artist, the domestic, and the boy—sate drinking and conversing until the booming bell of St. Sepulchre's Church proclaimed the hour of eleven.

"Now, then—to bed!" exclaimed Mr. Shrubsole, rising from his seat with a partial degree of difficulty, and staggering somewhat as he extended his hand to grasp the chamber-candle.

At this moment there was a loud and imperious double-knock at the street door;—and the domestic hastened to respond to the summons. Those who remained behind in the kitchen heard her ascend the stairs—open the door—answer a few questions put to her by several voices both male and female—and then admit the visitors into the passage, the door immediately afterwards closing behind them. All this did Mr. Shrubsole, George Woodfall, and the boy Tom hear as plainly as possible in the kitchen below: but suddenly a dead silence succeeded and not another sound reached them after the echoes raised by shutting of the street-door had died away.

"This is very ex—tri—traordinary," murmured Mr. Shrubsole, glancing with a kind of vacant uneasiness at the artist. "I could swear—hic—that—I—heard people come—hic—into the—hic—hic—house."

"I will go and see," said Woodfall:—and, hastening out of the kitchen, he ascended the stairs.

It struck both the picture-dealer and Tom that they heard something like a short scuffle in the passage over-head; but if it were so, the conflict ceased almost instantaneously and was unmarked by a single cry for assistance. A solemn silence again prevailed;—and uselessly did Shrubsole hold his breath in the hope of catching the

sounds of George Woodfall's returning footsteps. It appeared as if both the servant and the artist had been spirited away by some supernatural agency: for not a sound was heard—no, not even the rustling of dress!

"Tom—Tom—the devil's in the house," whispered the picture-dealer, pretty well sobered by the terror arising from the mysterious occurrences of the last few minutes.

"Lord bless ye, sir!" returned the boy; "I'll be bound it's only a bit of fun of some kind or another. I'm not afraid."

And away he rushed up the staircase, purposely making his hob-nailed shoes clatter as heavily as he could upon the steps. The picture-dealer listened with suspended breath: he could tell when the boy reached the passage—and there he suddenly stopped. At the same instant a sharp noise, like that of a man's hand slapping a face or striking with the flat of the palm against a wall, fell on Shrubsole's ear. A short rapid scuffle followed;—and then all was still throughout the house, and silent as the grave.

The old man sank down upon a chair, gasping for breath; while his countenance, as the flickering gleams of a wretched candle played upon it, was hideous with the workings of excessive terror. His limbs trembled convulsively—his lips, white and bloodless, quivered like aspens—and his eyes glared wildly in the direction of the door, leading to the dark staircase, as if he every moment expected that some grisly spectre would come forth from the obscurity.

Suddenly he started up: his fears goaded him to desperation;—and desperation gave him courage. Thieves might be plundering his house, while he was sitting helplessly and pusillanimously in the kitchen.

At taking up the light, he ascended the stairs, holding the candle high above his head so as to throw its rays forward. But scarcely had he mounted a dozen steps, when something glided through the air—apparently coming from the passage: and in a moment the candle was struck from an old man's hand.

Uttering a loud cry, he fell back as senseless;—and when consciousness slowly returned, he found himself seated by the kitchen fire, on which more logs had evidently been heaped. At the same instant he became aware that he was fastened by a strong cord,

which bound him hand and foot, to the arm-chair wherein he had been so considerably placed.

A candle—the very one which had been dashed from his grasp by the well-aimed missile—was burning on the table;—and around the kitchen did Mr. Shrubsole now glance hastily. His fears—if his selfishness allowed him to entertain any apart from those which concerned his property and his gold—were immediately relieved in respect to the artist, the old female dependant, and the boy Tom;—for these three individuals were his companions—but each bound, like himself, to a chair,

"What—how—when——" stammered the bewildered picture-dealer, anxious to ask questions but unable to find words to frame them.

"Silence!" exclaimed a sharp imperious female voice close behind Mr. Shrubsole's chair: and at the same instant he felt something cold touch the back of his neck.

Throwing his body forward as far as the cords would permit, he hastily turned his head and beheld a woman, with a black crape mask over her countenance and a pair of horse-pistols in her hands, evidently mounting guard upon the four prisoners.

"Hold your tongue—and no harm shall happen to you, sir," continued the woman. "No robbery is intended—and it will be your fault if violence or bloodshed should ensue. Raise but your voice one note higher than you have already spoken, and I will send a bullet through your head without an instant's hesitation."

And again she placed the cold muzzle of a pistol behind his ear: for this woman appeared to play with the murderous weapons as if they had been familiar toys from her very birth.

"In fact, the shortest plan and the best," she continued, "is not to speak at all. This I have recommended to your three fellow-prisoners; and they are wisely following my counsel."

"Think not, woman," observed the young artist, irritated by this observation, "that my silence is occasioned by fear of you or your pistols. But, bound as I am to the chair, you my well suppose that I have little inclination to open my lips in discourse."

"I will give you credit, sir, for any motive you please, so long as you do not speak too loud," said the woman.

Gorge Woodfall made no answer but a hollow moan escaped the picture-

dealer; while the female servant heaved a profound sigh. As for the boy Tom—he dozed off into a comfortable nap;—and a deep silence now reigned in the kitchen and throughout the house.

CHAPTER LIV.

JOE WARREN IN NEWGATE.

We must now return to the Magsman, whom we left at the moment when Mrs. Brace, with a studied hypocrisy assumed in order to blind Mr. Soper, raised her hands and eyes in apparent despair at the prisoner's hardened nature.

The heavy door clanged again upon the solitary occupant of that cell: he heard the key turn in the lock and the bolts shoot into their sockets;—and then he waited until the sounds of the retreating footsteps died away in the passage.

But so soon as all was still—save the low rumbling of the vehicles in the adjacent street—the Magsman lost no more time ere he examined the parcel which his wife had so dexterously slipped into his hand. The contents thereof were as follow:—

1. A map, or plan, of Newgate.
2. A small file.
3. Four stout and well pointed nails.
4. A cord of twisted silk, not much thicker than common string, but strong enough to sustain an immense weight.
5. Three pieces of iron, each about four inches in length and of the thickness of the thumb, and which were made to screw together so as to form a small but effective crowbar, or "jemmy."
6. A little piece of putty, mixed with black lead.

Such were the contents of the parcel and, although miscellaneous and numerous, they were easily packed into a very limited compass. A grim smile of satisfaction passed over the Magsman's countenance as he examined those articles one after the other; and having secured the file, the nails, the ball of silken cord, the disjointed "jemmy," and the scrap of paper containing the morsel of putty, about his person, he proceeded to study and scrutinize the plan of Newgate.

We have already stated that he was confined in that condemned cell which

stood last in the row of five on the ground-floor; and the map now before him showed that his cell was, as he had already suspected it to be, in the north-eastern angle of the gaol. The loop-hole looked upon Newgate Street; and the people passing along that thoroughfare, under the frowning wall, were within a yard of him. The eastern side of his dungeon joined Mr. Shrubsole's house.

We have also informed the reader that there were five condemned cells overhead, on the first floor; and another row of cells higher still, on the second floor: consequently there were two rooms between the ceiling of the Magsman's dungeon and the roof of the prison.

Having thus examined those details of the plan which especially concerned himself, the Magsman thrust the map into his pocket, and drew forth the file. This little instrument, scarcely larger than the blade of a pen-knife, was as admirably tempered as a watch-spring. The Magsman bent it into a complete circle, and it flew back into unimpaired straightness; and he knew thereby that a Sheffield workshop, and no imitative London manufactory, had produced the file.

Seating himself on the pavement floor, and having spread his handkerchief to catch the glistening particles of metal, the Magsman began to file one of the huge links of his massive chains. To one less courageous, persevering, and experienced than himself, the task now undertaken would have appeared about as hopeful as an attempt to pull down a house with a nail: but Joe Warren knew well what he had to achieve, and the amount of work which the trusty file, with its sharp and irresistible teeth, could accomplish.

Presently, the clock of St. Sepulchre struck one. It was dinner time, the Magsman hastened to comb his hair, and gather up his handkerchief. Then, into the space which the opening in the half-severed link had formed, he inserted some of the putty which, beir and shining, corresponded so exactly with the iron that the most keen and searching eyes could not have detected the process which was in operation.

Scarcely was this little arrangement made, when heavy footsteps were heard in the echoing passage—were drawn—the door was opened, and the man Soper appeared with a

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dish in one hand and a pot of beer in the other.

"Your friends take good care of you, old feller," said the gaol functionary, as he removed the cover from the dish, more out of curiosity than politeness.

"Roast fowl, sausages, mashed taters, and new bread—my eyes! don't you come it strong? A quart of strong beer, too; well, you ain't wery much to be pitied, I don't think. Your grub is a deuced sight better than gaol allowance."

"Will you sit down and have some dinner with me?" asked the Magsman.

"Can't stop—or else I would," responded Soper. "But I don't mind a drop of beer:"—and, with these words, he took a tolerable long draught. "I say, old feller," he observed, setting down the pot and wiping his mouth with his coat-sleeve, "your trial comes on the day after to-morrow. I've just seen the calendar."

"Well—it can't be helped," said the Magsman. "I've made my mind up to the worst."

"The very best thing you can do," responded Mr. Soper, intending his remark to be of a consolatory nature. "What a precious fine woman that was which I showed round the gaol just now! Such eyes—and such teeth—and such bust! She give me half-a-guinea for my trouble. But I'm perwinting you from eating your dinner—and I'm a-vastin my own time. So I'll be off now and come back in twenty minutes or so for the things."

Soper accordingly retired—looking and bolting the door carefully after him. For, with all his apparent familiarity and good feeling towards the Magsman and with all the characteristic avarice of an official he was incorruptible in this capacity; and no money which Joe Warren or his friends had, it in their power to offer, would have induced him to wink or connive at an escape. Indeed, during the short time he had remained in the cell, his eyes had travelled rapidly, but keenly and searchingly, over every link in the Magsman's chains: and had he caught the faintest glimpse of anything calculated to excite his suspicions, he would have immediately summoned an assistant who had accompanied him as far as the entrance of the passage, and the most rigid investigation would have been the result.

However, his penetration and shrewdness were baffled for once; and the Magsman chuckled inwardly as he sate

down to the enjoyment of the roast fowl, the sausages, the mashed potatoes, and the porter, which an eating-house in the Old Bailey had supplied. We should however observe that the fowl and sausages had been previously cut up into pieces, the potatoes turned over with a spoon, and even the very beer poured from one pot into another, by the busy hands of Mr. Soper, to assure himself that no file nor watch-spring was secreted. Against the articles intended for the prisoner's dinner.

The Magsman understood the meaning of all this, and knew that a strict watch was kept upon him: but he was very far from despairing of his escape; and as he devoured his food with a ravenous appetite, he said to himself, "To-morrow I shall not dine in Newgate."

At the expiration of about twenty minutes, Soper returned to take away the dishes, and pewter-pot, all of which Joe Warren had cleared; and when the door again closed upon him and he was once more alone, he knew that he had four hours and a half to work in before he should experience another interruption.

And with such hearty good will did the Magsman ply the irresistible file, that by the time St. Sepulchre's Church struck six in the evening, two thirds of the labour was accomplished in respect to the massive chains with which he was laden. The booming of the bell, as it proclaimed that hour, was the signal for him to desist again; and, having concealed the file and filled up the several portion of the links with the black putty, he lay down on the iron bedstead and affected to have been sleeping when Mr. Soper re-appeared with his supper and a candle.

A few remarks were interchanged; and the Magsman was left to the enjoyment of his meal. In twenty minutes Soper returned to fetch the plate and pewter-pot; and Warren had then two hours wherein to continue his operations until the official should make his last round for the night.

During these two hours the Magsman filed almost completely through each of the four links which it was necessary to sever in order to enable himself to throw off his chains at the proper time; and he had scarcely filled up the places with the remains of his blackened putty, when Soper entered the cell. The man examined the shackles, all over, and appeared quite satisfied that

they had not been tampered with. He then wished the Magsman good night, and took his departure, double-locking the door, and securely fastening all the bolts.

The candle, having been sent in from the coffee-house which supplied the Magsman's meals, was not taken away from him: for, in the times of which we are writing, untried prisoners were permitted the use of lights until a late hour,—and Mrs. Soper saw by the length of the candle that it would not burn much beyond eleven o'clock.

The Magsman resolved to wait until the church of St. Sepulchre should have struck nine; ere he commenced the grand operations which he hoped would result in his escape. There was the possibility, though certainly not the probability, that Soper might take it into his head to pay him another visit that evening: but he felt confident that if the official came at all, it would be at nine clock.

Slowly—slowly passed that hour, during which the Magsman weighed, with some anxiety, all the chances for and against his escape. At one moment he dreaded lest Soper suspected his intentions: at another he feared that his friends might fail in accomplishing *their* portion of the work in the picture-dealer's house. Then his blood ran cold in his veins as the idea struck him that the implements which he possessed and the short time that he could command were totally inadequate for the immensity of the task that must be accomplished: and even when he reasoned himself into confidence on these heads, another source of alarm presented itself. What if some prisoner had been placed, during the day, in the cell overhead—or in the cell higher up still?

"No—it isn't likely," thought the Magsman to himself. "No one has been condemned to death *yet* during this session: and if there was, the ground-floor cells would be filled first."

Again did the voice of his own fears suggest, in whispering tones, that desperate characters like himself, might have been incarcerated during the last few hours in the cells above.

"Well—and if so," was his self-solacing argument, "any fellow that I might fall against in such a position would be only too glad to seize the opportunity of escaping along with me."

Scarcely had he arrived at this conclusion, when the clock struck nine;—

and no intrusive step approached the door of his cell.

He waited ten minutes longer;—and still all was quiet, save the rumbling of the carts and hackney-coaches in Newgate Street.

"Now for it!" exclaimed the Magsman to himself; and, with a comparatively slight effort, he broke off his chains.

A weight seemed to be lifted from his heart in a moment: it bounded with an elasticity which scattered all remaining doubts and fears to the winds. He felt as if half of his freedom were already accomplished, and that it only depended on himself to consummate the rest. Had he imbibed a tumbler full of brandy, the effects could not have been more exhilarating.

Without losing a moment unnecessarily, Joe Warren screwed the three pieces of the jenny together. He then drew the iron bedstead as noiselessly as possible into the middle of the cell, and lifted it upon one end. By means of the chair he mounted on the head-board, which was uppermost; and now, through the deep loop-hole of his dungeon, he could see the lights in the houses on the opposite side of Newgate Street. Yes—and he beheld the people passing in both directions: and the forms of the drives seated outside their vehicles were borne rapidly by. Life and bustle were without; solitude and death within:—and he must escape—oh! he must escape—from the gloom and the danger of the latter, to join once more the companionship and the pleasures of the former!

We have already stated that the cell had a vaulted roof: and consequently the centre thereof was the thinnest part. Mounted on the upraised bedstead, the Magsman attacked with his crowbar the solid masonry overhead—loosening the mortar as well as he was able round the key-stone of the arched ceiling. The task was by no means easy: for the mortar had hardened into the callosity of the granite blocks which it held together—the position in which Warren was forced to labour was an awkward one—at the dust of the disturbed lime fell in his eyes.

Nevertheless he toiled courageous on in spite of these disadvantages; and in half-an-hour a large stone next to the central one was dislodged. The first breach having been made materially facilitated the ensuing operations: the key-stone itself w

soon removed—and by ten o'clock a considerable excavation was formed in the middle of the ceiling, so that the Magsman could feel with his hand the lower side of a flagstone in the pavement of the cell overhead.

To raise this flag was no easy matter. It was necessary to clear away all the masonry adhering to those parts where it joined the circumjacent stones, from which it had to be separated by the jenny. But at length this labour was accomplished: and the Magsman, to his infinite joy, found the flag yield to his vigorous upward pressure.

He moved it away from the mouth of the aperture which he had thus formed; and, without any difficulty, the adventurous Magsman passed through that opening into the cell immediately above his own. He dared not take the candle with him—for if any official of the prison should happen to be passing along Newgate Street and observe a light streaming from the loop-hole of a room which he knew to be occupied at the time, a suspicion that something wrong was going on would instantly be followed by search—the result of which must, as a matter of course, prove fatal to the Magsman's enterprise.

In the dark, therefore, did he hastily grope about the cell into which he had thus worked his way:—and, to his joy, he discovered that it contained an iron bedstead similar to the one which have served him as a scaffolding below. Tilting it up lengthways and mounting on the head-board, as in the former instance, the Magsman renewed his operations by a determined attack on the ceiling of this cell on the first floor.

If his progress were not so rapid as hitherto, and if the necessity of working in the dark materially impeded his operations, nevertheless he found some recompense in the fact that the roof he was now assailing was not near so thick as the one through which he had already passed. Nevertheless, the toil was arduous in the extreme: the dust getting into his throat, created a burning thirst; and he was several times forced to descend and drink from the large pitcher of water in his own cell. But every piece of mortar which he broke away and every stone which he removed, appeared in his eyes to be another and another obstacle overcome; and, so far from despairing, his hopes acquired strength as time progressed.

Midnight sounded from St. Sepulchre's just as the Magsman succeeded in raising a large flag which covered the excavation he had formed in the vaulted roof of this dungeon on the first floor; and in a few minutes he passed up into the cell overhead. Around the walls, in the total darkness, did he sweep his hands: but, alas! this time he was disappointed—for the place was entirely empty—and there was no iron bedstead to form a scaffolding.

This contingency had however been provided for, as the reader will soon find.

Descending into the room beneath, the Magsman thrust the blanket and cover-lid (*alias* horse-cloth) belonging to the bed, up into the top cell; and mounting thither once more, he resumed his operations with fresh energy, though working in utter darkness.

Using the trusty crowbar as a hammer, he drove two of the four nails which had been sent him, into one of the walls, at a distance of five feet from the floor, and about a foot apart from each other. The remaining two he drove into the opposite wall, preserving as nearly as he could guess the same relative position. He then unwound his ball or silken cord, and fastened it from nail to nail, in such a manner that two parallel lines, with an interval of twelve inches, extended from wall to wall; and as the length of the string allowed these lines to be doubled, they were, competent to bear a very considerable weight.

The Magsman now folded the blanket and horse cloth into a sort of square cushion, which he placed upon the lines; and, having without much difficulty seated himself thereon, he was fairly balanced at a height of five feet from the floor, and at convenient distance from the ceiling which he now attacked with his crowbar.

One o'clock struck before the intrepid Joe Warren succeeded in moving the first stone. Well-nigh exhausted with the extraordinary exertions he had already made—so parched with thirst that his tongue seemed like a piece of charcoal—and finding his tight-rope scaffold, ingenious though the contrivance might be, most inconvenient for his operations, the nearer he drew to the threshold of liberty, the greater became the difficulties which he had to encounter.

But still he did his best; and he worked cheerily, cheerily on;—nor

would he waste time by descending into the cell on the ground-floor to slake his burning thirst with the water that was there.

Every now and then he paused for a few moments to listen—and when some suspicious noise met his ears, the Magsman grasped his crowbar all the more tightly, and ground his teeth together,—for he was animated with the ferocious resolve to murder the first person who might appear to molest him. But on each occasion his apprehensions proved groundless—and he resumed his toils with a resuscitated energy.

All on a sudden the silken cords snapped in twain—and Joe Warren fell heavily upon the stone pavement.

He was sorely bruised; and for an instant he imagined that one of his legs was broken:—but rising slowly and painfully he shook himself like a lion that has just escaped from the pursuit of hunters—and a savage growl burst from his breast.

What was he to do? To mend the lines so as to enable them to bear his weight again, was impossible. A thought struck him!—he would descend to the cell beneath and pull the iron bedstead to pieces in order to form a scaffold for the continuation of his labours.

Rolling up the blanket and horse-cloth, and fastening them together so as to constitute a rope, he tied one end round the huge flag-stone which he had displaced from the floor of the uppermost cell, and passed the rope through the hole into the dungeon beneath: because when once the iron bedstead should have been broken up, he would lose that means of ascent into the top dungeon again.

Descending into the cell on the first storey, he lowered the bedstead to its proper horizontal position, and tried the screws which held the various pieces together. But he was enveloped in darkness—the candle in his own cell had been extinguished for the last two hours—and he could possibly pursue the present operations in such dense obscurity. Gnashing his teeth with rage, and giving vent to horrible imprecations in an under tone, the Magsman again and again tried the screws with his crowbar: but they were so completely rusted into their sockets, that half-an-hour was thus passed without producing the slightest effect upon any one of them.

What was he to do? Again he asked

himself this question; and, sitting down exhausted on the bed which had fruitlessly endeavoured to break up, he wiped the perspiration and the dust from his throbbing brows.

The Magsman was perfectly ferocious: he chafed like a starved lion in a cage—he would have ruthlessly murdered any turnkey or prison official who might have appeared at that moment.

Yet something must be done! Time was passing: the hour was already gone by at which his friends expected that he would have succeeded in working his way through the masonry of the top cell so that only a thin sheet of lead should lie between him and liberty!

What if he were to tear the sacking of the straw-mattress into slips, and fasten them to the four nails in the place of the broken cord of silk? Yes—this was the only course which he could now adopt. Had there been a sacking, lashed with ropes in the usual way, to the bed, all this trouble and anxiety were spared him: but, alas! the foundation of that bedstead was a thin sheet of iron, supported by cross bars of the same metal, and on which the mattress lay.

No time was to be lost! With his powerful hands he tore open that mattress—turned out the straw—and rent the coarse stuff into several long slips. These he twisted up and fastened together; and ascending once more to the top cell, he fixed his new tight-rope apparatus. It answered the purpose even far better than he had expected;—and with reviving spirits, to work the Magsman went again.

The clock struck two as he thus resumed his toils; and he muttered to himself, "If nothing more happens to hinder me I shall be safe away before that bell speaks again."

Tremendous were the exertions which the Magsman now made to accomplish his purpose: the Masonry fell about him in large pieces—the dust involved him in a dense and palpable cloud, floating amidst the darkness—and the perspiration streamed down his face as if water had been poured over his head.

At length, immediately after the fall of a stone which had resisted his efforts for several minutes, his crowbar struck against the lead which covered the flat roof of the gaol!

Then he paused, and listened with the deepest suspense.

From this cruel and almost agonising uncertainty he was speedily released: for three low but perfectly audible knocks upon the lead, convinced him that his friends were *there*!

Again he renewed his toils;—and every moment the hollow in the ceiling grew larger and larger.

Presently the lead was lifted from over the excavation—the fresh breeze blew upon his burning features—and as he looked up he saw a countenance bending down over the hole thus formed.

“All right, Mr. Warren—there’s nothing to apprehend!” were the reassuring words that met his ears, and which were uttered in the well-known voice of the Kinchin-Grand.

A few minutes’ more labour sufficed to widen the aperture sufficiently to enable the strong arms of the Kinchin-Grand and two powerful men who were also with him, to drag Joe Warren up through the hole;—and he now stood upon the leads of Newgate.

A rope, which had been fastened to the chimney of Mr. Shrubsole’s house, enabled the escaped felon and his three friends to gain the roof of that dwelling, into which they entered by means of a garret window.

“Now you can refresh yourself with a drop of somethink short,” said the Kinchin-Grand.

The Magsman instinctively thrust out his hand in the dark, and grasped the case-bottle which his faithful and considerate friend thus tendered him. Long and deep was Joe Warren’s draught: and never, in all his life had the ardent alcohol seemed so welcome, so good, and so invigorating.

“You have this night done a thing that’ll immortalise you,” said the Kinchin-Grand, inspired with a sentiment of profound admiration for the daring feat which the Magsman had so triumphantly achieved and which had thus enabled him to escape from the strongest prison in all England.

“Well, I don’t think it was a bad night’s work, young fellow,” returned the Magsman. “But who are your two friends, that I may thank them for the service they have done in helping you in this matter?—for it was too dark on the leads to catch a glimpse of their features—and here it’s darker still.”

“I suppose that the names of Dick the Tramper and Miles the Buzgloak ain’t unbeknown to you, Mr. Warren?” said the Kinchin-Grand, with a chuckling laugh.

“I should rather think not?” exclaimed the Magsman, evidently delighted to be in such good company. “Tip us your mawley, Dick my boy—now, Miles, give us your hand—and thank you both kindly for this night’s assistance.”

“It was easy work so far as we was concerned, after all,” observed the Tramper, who spoke in a thick, husky tone, which was natural to him.

“And had it been ten times as difficult, we’d have done it for you, old feller,” added Miles the Buzgloak.

Lord bless ye! what a lark it was,” exclaimed the Kinchin-Grand, having drained the flask which he had passed round. “Fust, when we double-knocked at the door, crack went a pitch-plaster over the mouth of the old woman as opened it—and she was pinioned in a jiffey. Then we staved as still as death—and up comed a tall gentleman, whom we sarved just the same. Then comed the boy—and smack goes the Burgundy plaster again. Last of all old Shrubsole make his appearance——”

“Well, we musn’t stay chattering here,” interrupted the Magsman, somewhat impatiently. “Where’s Lizzy Marks?”

“Keeping guard on the people of the house down in the kitchen,” replied the precocious captain of the Kinchin-Prigs. “We carried ’em all down there, and took off the pitch-plasters from the three as had ’em dabbed on their faces; and your missus is a keepin’ them quiet with loaded pistols. But come along down stairs—and we’ll call her up.”

The villains accordingly descended the several flights leading to the passage communicating with the front door; and the Kinchin-Grand hurried down into the lower regions to communicate to the Gallows’ Widow the welcome intelligence of her flash man’s safety. But she had already heard the sounds of the heavy footsteps on the stairs; and rushing from the kitchen, she hastily gave the pistols to the Kinchin-Grand whom she met on her way, and a moment afterwards was hugging the Magsman with the most unfeigned sincerity.

When this transport of feeling was over—a feeling which even that criminal and degraded woman could experience as well as the Duchess clothed in silks and satins,—the Gallows’ Widow recovered all her wonted calmness and self-possession.

"You must go out alone first—we'll follow in an hour," she said. "Yes—you must have a full hour," she continued, in a low and rapid whisper, "before we leave this house or allow the people in it a chance of freeing themselves from the cords that bind them. Here—I have provided you a large slouched hat—a cloak—and a thick shawl handkerchief to tie round your neck."

And as she thus spoke, the woman took the various articles enumerated from a bag which in the meantime had been lying on the floor in the passage.

The Magsman speedily put on the disguise so considerably provided; then having taken leave of Dick the Trumper and Miles the Buzgloak, and having whispered two or three words in the ears of the Gallows' Widow, he issued from the house.

CHAPTER LV.

THE MILLINER AND THE PRINCE.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening of the day which followed the memorable night of Joe Warren's escape from Newgate; and Mrs. Brace was seated alone in her comfortable parlour, when Harriet entered to announce *Mr. Harley*.

The Prince of Wales advanced into the room, the door of which was immediately closed behind him; and the milliner rose to welcome his Royal Highness with her sweetest smiles.

"My dear friend," he said, kissing her buxom cheeks—for she was looking most invitingly handsome—"you must really have fancied that I had forgotten you. I have not seen you since that unfortunate Sunday evening—nearly three weeks ago—when we both of us experienced so cruel a shock—"

"And to speak candidly," interrupted Mrs. Brace a blush mantling upon her countenance, "I was fearful that you were too much disgusted on that occasion ever to cross my threshold again."

"What I have you no better opinion of my friendship?" exclaimed the Prince passing his arm round the milliner's waist and drawing her towards him: then, having again kissed her, he made her resume her seat; and placing himself near her, he observed, "It was an unfortunate affair, for which you were in no way to blame. Will

you not believe me when I assure you it was very far from being on that account that I have not called for a fortnight and upwards? The truth is, I am worried to death with this marriage-scheme which my august father and his Ministers have got up for me, and which I dare say you have seen announced in the papers. Besides, my creditors are pressing me on all sides,—they dun—threaten me with exposure—leave insolent messages at Carlton House—write the most insulting letters to my private secretary—"

"Ah! my dear Prince how I wish that I was wealthy enough to assist you!" exclaimed Mrs. Brace.

"I know you possess the most generous heart, Fanny—and therefore you can feel for me," said his Royal Highness, "But as I was telling you these sources of vexation have made me ill—and I have scarcely been out of doors since I saw you last. This explanation will convince you that no unfriendly motive kept me away. I have often thought of you—especially when I read in the paper that the miserable man Joseph Warren was in custody."

"Ah! then you recognised the identity of that prisoner—with—my—"

And the handsome milliner stopped, blushed deeply, and held down her head.

"Why should you make allusions that distress you Fanny?" demanded the Prince. "Yes—I knew immediately that Joseph Warren who was thus arrested must be the same individual who—But no matter: and I suppose that you are aware of the marvellous escape which he achieved last night?"

"I am not only aware of it," responded the milliner: "but I was forced—yes—absolutely forced to assist him in the enterprise," she added, in a low and mournful tone.

"You!" ejaculated the Prince, in unfeigned astonishment.

"Yes, indeed," she immediately replied. "You of course understand that I am completely in his power—and when a woman who is connected with him called upon me and represented how my services could be rendered available, I was compelled to submit to an imperious necessity I should not tell you all this—but you are so intimately acquainted with my affairs and my position, that it were ridiculous to conceal anything from you."

"I should be sorry if you did, Fanny," said the Prince, assuming his

kindest tone—but only because there was a certain matter in which he required the milliner's assistance: otherwise the selfishness of his disposition would have rendered him impatient of the turn which the conversation had taken. "Proceed—tell me all that has occurred, so far as you were concerned."

"I shall not detain your attention on that point many minutes," answered Mrs. Brace, who, on her side, was merely volunteering explanation in order to ascertain how far the sympathies of the Prince would extend in her favour—for the lapse of long years had not completely annihilated the affection which she had once borne him, "You must know," she continued, "that I yesterday paid a visit to that frightful prison of Newgate. The object of this proceeding was to supply the wretched man with the means of escape. Had any of his known friends sought an interview with him, they would have been so closely watched as to render it impossible to slip even a file into his hand—much less a packet of some size: whereas I being looked upon as a stranger whom curiosity had led to visit the gaol, found that opportunity comparative ease. In the packet which I was thus enabled to convey to him, there was a plan of Newgate, drawn up by some of his confederates outside the walls who were evidently full well acquainted with the interior. This plan showed him how his own cell was situated—how many rooms there were above him—and how he must work through the ceiling of each in order to arrive at the leads. The newspapers have told you the rest."

"Yes—and the whole thing was most admirably managed, truly," observed the Prince. "The idea of his accomplices getting into the house adjoining the prison—overpowering and binding the inmates—then ascending to the

Myence they alighted on the top Meagle ate in order to cut away the receive ll this, I say, was excellent and am so da spirit of combination and is such se worthy of a better cause.

"The you any idea of what has said the of the villain?"

and arr—and now let us cease to showered him, said Mrs. Brace.

lets over so, my dear Fanny," rejoined

"Exace: "for I have many things to sit down u about. In the first place, light you seen Lord Florimel?—for have time not, I hope, forgotten the he comes, me which we settled together

the last time I was here, and the object of which was to cure him of his sickly sentimentalism."

"I saw him very recently," answered Mrs. Brace, a deep blush again mantling her countenance—but for a reason far different from that which had previously called it up.

"And you have succeeded?" said the Prince. "Ah! that tale glow upon your plump cheeks, Fanny—"

"No—I did *not* succeed," interrupted the milliner. "I lavished all my arts and wiles upon the object in view—and at the moment when I was about to triumph and he to succumb, a most unexpected intrusion dissolved the spell which I had cast upon him—and he escaped me."

"And you have not seen him since?" inquired the Prince.

"No. But he shall not escape me thus," added the milliner. "I have a thousand stratagems as yet unexhausted, and which I know well how to adopt in such a case," she observed, a wanton smile playing upon her moist lips and showing her brilliant teeth.

"Would that you were kind and amiable enough to use of them in my behalf!" exclaimed the Prince, fixing upon her a look full of meaning.

"Ah! you have seen another houri who has smitten you," said Mrs. Brace, the wantonness of her smile now changing into archness—both irresistibly fascinating!

"You have conjectured the truth, Fanny," was the reply; "and your aid is needed to catch the wary and haughty, but beauteous bird in an inextricable mesh."

"The affair is, then, a difficult one?" said Mrs. Brace, inquiringly.

"More difficult than any amour which I have ever yet undertaken," answered the Prince; "inasmuch as the new object of my fancy is no young and inexperienced girl to be subdued by means of sophistry, promises, pledges, vows, and protestations—no woman of the middle class whom it is comparatively easy to dazzle with the splendour of my rank—no lady of easy virtue who values the title of the Prince's mistress more than her own coronet."

"Then who, in heaven's name, can she be?" inquired Mrs. Brace.

"A lady of high rank and most unimpeachable virtue," returned his Royal Highness: "a lady who has never furnished scandal with the slightest ground to assail her fair fame

and who nevertheless lives on terms of a singular and unaccountable nature with her husband. This husband is handsome—rich—elegant in manners—accomplished—generous and in every respect formed to render a young and beautiful wife happy. But rumour declares that they live apart, though under the same roof—

"You allude to the countess of Desborough!" exclaimed Mrs. Brace, suddenly interrupting the description which the Prince was giving her.

"I do. But are you acquainted—"

"I have the honour of her ladyship's patronage," rejoined the milliner.

"By heaven! this is fortunate," ejaculated the Prince, his countenance expressing the liveliest joy, "Does the Countess ever visit your establishment?"

"Seldom—and even then she merely stops in her carriage at the door to issue some order," said Mrs. Brace.

"I usually attend her ladyship at her own mansion in Berkeley Square. Indeed, it is singular enough that I am to wait upon her the day after to-morrow at eleven o'clock in the morning."

"Oh! If your fertile brain could only devise some means of bringing that haughty woman to my arms, I would never, never cease to think of you with gratitude—the deepest gratitude, Fanny," said the Prince;—and, as he thus spoke, he took Mrs. Brace's plump, warm, white hand and pressed it tenderly.

"First let me know upon what terms you are with her ladyship," remarked the milliner. "As a matter of course you are acquainted with her: but does she suspect that you admire her? I am half-inclined to believe that you have expressed your feelings already in that quarter; and, being too precipitate, you have experienced a rebuff. Else wherefore do you denominate her proud and haughty."

"You have guessed rightly, my dear friend," said the Prince. "It was, on the very day after that disagreeable Sunday evening to which we have already alluded that I called at Desborough House in Berkeley Square—and I saw the countess alone. Although I had known her for some years, yet never before had she struck me as being so ravishingly beautiful. She dazzled—bewildered—fascinated me; and, unable to restrain my feeling, I cast myself at her feet. For a moment she yielded her hand to me—and I could see the fires of excite-

ment flash from her eyes and the warm blushes glow upon her cheeks. But suddenly recovering herself, she assumed all the hauteur which would have become her so much better had she adopted that proud attitude at once. I soothed her—and our conversation proceeded: on her part, it almost seemed to encourage me—and, worked up nearly to a pitch of frenzy, I caught her in my arms. Again she abandoned herself to me for a few moments—and again did her eyes sparkle, and her cheeks glow with wanton blushes. But all in an instant she sprang from my embrace—uttered some words of reproach—and, ringing the bell, ordered my carriage to be summoned to the door, the menial of course believing that I myself must have expressed a wish to depart. But ere I left her, I was foolish enough to murmur some threat in her ears—and since that day I have not beheld her."

"Can you not read the enigma of her ladyship's conduct?" asked Mrs. Brace. "The explanation may be summed up in a few words. She is a woman of strong passions and stubborn virtue: her deeply-seated principles triumphed over her consuming desires."

"Yes—it must be as you have represented my dear friend," said the Prince.

"And therefore it will be almost impossible to corrupt the Countess of Desborough," rejoined Mrs. Brace.

"What! have you no hope to give me—no stratagem to suggest—no scheme to propose?" exclaimed his Royal Highness. "Ah! is this your fertility in resources, Fanny?"

I do not profess to work miracles," was the answer. "Give me the common clay and I will undertake to mould it into the shape required: but if you place granite in my hands, it will resist all attempts to model it to a particular purpose."

"True!" ejaculated the Prince.

"And yet I am not disposed to abandon the enterprise on account of repugnance. Look you here, Fanny," continued, throwing a Bank note upon the table: "there are five hundred pounds—poor as I am, I can spare any amount for such an object. Replicable, I do not mean to insult you by assigning mercenary motives to the alliance which you so often render me. I know that you have heavy and anxious to meet in various ways—and anxious to that amount will sharpen your eye for my behalf on the present occasion, my dear friend."

"Well—I suppose that I must see what I can do in the matter," said Mrs. Brace. "Leave me to devise some project to smooth your path to the envied bower of the fair lady. After all, she is not ice—but flesh and blood—aye, and blood is warm, too, that flows in her veins. But have you forgotten your Octavia?—does she no longer engage your thoughts, even for a single moment?"

"I love and adore her with a lasting passion," exclaimed the Prince: "and I shall write to her in a day or two to request her to meet me here. She believes that I am out of town for the present. But my affection for that beauteous girl is quite of a different nature from that which inspires me with regard to the Countess of Desborough. You say that you will see her ladyship the day after to-morrow in the forenoon? Well—in the evening I shall do myself the pleasure of visiting you again. Meantime farewell, dear Fanny."

And having embraced the handsome milliner, his Royal Highness took his departure.

CHAPTER LVI.

TWO SPECIMENS OF THE "NEW LIGHTS."

At the same time that the preceding dialogue was taking place in Pall Mall, a scene of scarcely a less interesting character was in progress at Mr. Meagles' lodgings in Jermyn Street.

Shortly after eight o'clock on this particular evening, Lady Letitia Lade, habited in her Amazonian garb, arrived at her friend's abode, and was immediately conducted by the agile Wasp to the parlour where his master was discussing a cigar and a bottle of Maderia.

"My dearest Letitia," exclaimed Meagles bounding from his chair to receive and welcome the huntress: "I am so delighted you are come. There is such a treat in store for you!"

"The canting person, I'll be bound," said the Amazon, laying aside her hat and arranging her glossy hair, as it showered in a thousand luxuriant ringlets over her well-formed shoulders.

"Exactly so," cried Meagles. "But sit down—take a glass of Maderia—light your cigarette—and I shall just have time to tell you all about it before he comes."

The beautiful woman complied with the various invitations to which Meagles gave such rapid utterance; and lolling back in the chair while she stretched out her symmetrical legs towards the fender, he gave him a look to intimate that she was all attention.

"By the byè," said Meagles, "you have heard of Joe Warren's marvellous escape?"

"The whole town is ringing with it," responded the Amazon. "He is a perfect rival of Jack Sheppard. But let us hear about the *New Light*," she added, laughing.

"So you shall," returned Meagles. "This morning, at about ten o'clock, I wanted to go into the City to pay some money to a person of whom I bought a horse yesterday, and my gig was at the door, when as I was going down stairs, I overtook my sanctimonious neighbour, Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby. '*A fine morning, reverend sir,*' I observed—'*Yes; under the divine blessing,*' he observed; and then he turned round and stared at me very hard indeed. '*I presume,*' he continued, after a long silence and an equally protracted survey, '*that you are the flesh-pot of Egypt who dwelleth on the first floor of this tabernacle!*'—I acknowledge with hesitation that I was the flesh-pot alluded to; and although I had great mind to knock him down for his impudence, I restrained myself because such a proceeding on my part would only have spoilt the fun that you and I had determined to have with him.—'*Alas! alas!*' he murmured, groaning heavily at the same time, and rolling his eyes in an awful fashion: '*is it possible that such comely gentleman as you are can be a prey to all the sinful lusts of the flesh?*'—'*Really, sir,*' said I, '*I am at a loss to understand your meaning,*' and I was getting very savage.—'*Whose chariot of the Philistines is that at the door?*' he demanded suddenly, and without taking any notice of my observation.—'*It is my gig,*' I said; '*but as for its being a chariot or belonging to the Philistines, that is quite another part of the business.*'—'*Which way is the man of wrath going?*' inquired Mr. Sneaksby.—'*If you mean me, I am going into the City,*' was my answer.—'*I will accompany the ungodly one,*' said the reverend gentleman: '*he shall put me down at the gates of Salem, that the portals thereof may delight his eyes, and invite him some day to enter.*' And without any more ado, Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby clambered up into the gig, covered his legs with my spare cloak, and made

himself as comfortable as possible. So away we drove; and all along the Strand and Fleet Street the revered gentleman regaled me with a discourse on the vanity of every possible thing in this world that he could think of. At last, when we reached the commencement of Cheapside, he desired me to take him a little way up St. Martin's le Grand; and, in compliance with his wishes, I stopped at the door of a large chapel, on the front of which the word 'SALEM' was cut in large letters. Two sleek-looking men, dressed in black, and who were standing at the entrance with faces as demure as if they were mutes, came forward and assisted the holy man to alight; and Mr. Sneaksby, without uttering a word of thanks for the ride he had enjoyed, asked me if I would not *'tarry and hear the soul-refreshing discourse'* he was about to deliver. I expressed the regret I felt at my inability to accept his kind invitation; but I said that if he would honour me with his company for an hour on the evening, in my apartment, I should be charmed to listen to his edifying and instructive conversation. He took it quite seriously—seemed to have formed a much better opinion of me than at first—and promised to look in at half past eight o'clock. It is that now," added Tim, consulting his watch.

Scarcely had these last words fallen from the lips of Meagles, when slow and measured steps, were heard descending the stairs, as if a funeral procession were coming down.

"This is the parson," whispered Meagles chuckling in anticipation of glorious fun.

"But he is bringing somebody with him," observed the Amazon, in a similarly subdued tone.

"The more the merrier, if they're all like himself," responded Meagles. "Hush!"

Three measured and solemn knocks were given at the room door, as if a ghost were about to enter.

"Come in!" exclaimed Meagles, instantly putting on demure aspect—a proceeding in which he was imitated by the beautiful huntress, at least so far as she could induce her lovely, laughing, joyous features to assume a serious expression.

The door was thrown wide open—and the Rev. Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby entered the apartment with slow and sanctimonious face followed by one of the sleek-looking men whom Tim

Meagles had seen at the door of Salem Chapel.

But while these two pious individuals are settling themselves in the chairs which Meagles hastens to place near the table for their accommodation, we will just say a word respecting their external appearance.

The Rev. Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby was a man of about five and-forty years of age. The crown of his head was bald: but dark frizzy hair stood out in a bunch, on each side, between the temple and the ear. Behind it was cut very short indeed, and lay quite flat and straight. His countenance was thin, pale, and somewhat of the hatchet description; but it would not have been disagreeable were it not for the settled expression of sanctimonious gloom and melancholy demureness which it wore. For *cant* was written in every lineament and on every feature as plainly as the word may be read on this page: *cant* was seen in the rolling of the eyes—the gradual elevation and depression of brows—the pursing-up of the lips—the elongation of the chin—the slow studied movements of the head. Yes—and *cant*, too was recognised into the low white cravat that encircled the long, scraggy neck—the large shirt frill—the clerical cut of the black coat and waistcoat with stand up collars—and the knee breeches, bluish-black cotton stockings, and the great shoes with silver buckles. In person Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby was tall, thin, and slightly inclined to a stoop: and were it not for the measured pace at which he was accustomed to walk, his gait would have been shambling and awkward to a degree.

The individual who accompanied him was pressed in precisely the same manner: but in person he was very different. Short, thick-set, stout, and with a large, round, rubicund countenance, he presented a somewhat sleek, oily, and comfortable appearance in comparison with his friend—save that the habitual assumption of a demure expression of features would have led a stranger to believe that a naturally jovial and contented disposition had been marred and rendered wretched by some sudden affliction which had lingered ever since in the shape of a deeply seated and unappeasable woe. In a word, he looked like a jolly landlord fond of good ale, who having drunk himself into insolvency was compelled to adopt the profession

of undertaker's mute and moisten his food with nothing better than water. Not that such was really the case in the present instance: but such, we say, was the impression his aspect would have made upon the mind of any one who saw him for the first time,

Scarcely had Mr. Sneaksby and his friend taken their seats, when their looks fell simultaneously upon Lady Lade, who was surveying them from the corner of her laughing eyes, and gently puffing the cigarette with the lips which could not altogether suppress a smile.

The Rev. Mr. Sneaksby seemed petrified with sudden astonishment—and his friend appeared precisely in the same predicament. For upwards of a minute did they gaze, open-mouthed, upon the lovely creature lounging with graceful negligence in her chair. At the first glance they fancied it was a young and dandified man with his hair dressed in a feminine style: but as their looks wandered over the beautiful white forehead with its transparent tracery of azure veins faintly marked—the brightness of the rich moist coral lips—the total absence of beard and whisker—the fairness of the complexion—and the glossy silkiness of that raven hair,—as their eyes, we say, embraced all these fascinating details one after another, they began to entertain sore misgivings; and when their looks settled upon the exuberant and swelling contours of the full bosom over which the riding surtout fitted with such shapely tightness, developing rather than concealing those feminine charms of which the Amazon possessed such a voluptuous abundance, their faces, gradually elongated to a degree presenting the most ludicrous aspect of of woe begone sanctimoniousness and hypocritical misery.

"Nathaniel Sneaksby," said the short gentleman, at length recovering the power of speech, and raising his eyes and lifting his hands as if he were going off in a fit, "know ye aught of that carnal creature?"

"Verily, my dearly-beloved Ichabod Paxwax, she seemeth to me like the woman of Babylon," responded the reverend gentleman, imitating his friend in respect to the elevation of the eyes and hands.

Thereupon both Tim Meagles and the huntress burst into a hearty laugh; for so far from being offended at the observations just made, they had expect-

ed something of the kind and were highly amused at what they did hear.

"Brother Sneaksby, let us depart hence," said the gentleman whose name appeared to be Ichabod Paxwax: "for I fear that we have fallen in with the ungodly."

"It is precisely for that reason we must stay and our holy behest," returned the reverend minister, "Peradventure we may be enabled, by our savoury discourse, to render that lost one sensible of her evil ways: for she is comely to look upon, and it was a sorrow and a shame to abandon her to the vanities by which she is encompassed round about."

"We will stay, then," said Mr. Ichabod Paxwax, with whom Mr. Sneaksby's will was evidently law.

"Now, gentleman," exclaimed Meagles, "if you are really desirous that your presence should work salutary effects with regard to myself and my fair companion, you will accept such humble hospitality as I can offer you. There's Port Sherry, and Madeira upon that table—and at ten o' clock there's roast turkey, chine, mashed potatoes, and so on."

"Flesh-pots!" examined the Rev. Mr. Sneaksby shaking his head solemnly, but unable to prevent his lips from smacking slightly—for his nose had caught the rich odour which came up from the kitchen as he was ere now descending the stairs.

"Vanities!" murmured Mr. Ichabod Paxwax, his own lips watering amazingly and a hungry sensation coming over him.

"Yet, verily, for the stomach's sake must we do this," continued Mr. Sneaksby, filling a glass with Madeira.

"Yea, even so," added Mr. Ichabod Paxwax, pouring himself out a bumper of Port.

"Your names, gentlemen," said Meagles, "we know already. But you are not yet acquainted with my fair companion, whose fancy it is on occasions to wear a riding dress. Allow me to introduce you to Lady Letitia Lade, wife of Sir John Lade, one of the richest baronets in England."

The announcement of the Amazon's rank and wealthy alliance produced a sudden and startling effect upon the two pious gentlemen. They each made a terrible grimace, and looked awfully confused as the coarse allusions in which they had indulged flashed to their minds; and then they exchanged glances which said as elo-

quently as ever eyes yet spoke—"Brother Sneaksby, what a fool you made of yourself!" Brother Paxwax. what an ass you are!"

Thus is it ever with religious hypocrites. They will heap their cowardly abuse and aim their malignant shafts at a plain Mrs. Smith or a simple Mrs. Jones whom they behold or suspect to be in an equivocal situation; but let the offending woman prove to be a lady of title and fortune, and the canting humbugs close their eyes at once to all of her faults.

"Make yourselves comfortable, gentlemen," the Amazon observed after enjoying their confusion for nearly a minute, during which they fidgetted upon their chairs, exchanged glances ludicrously doleful, and threw furtive looks upon the lady whom they feared to have mortally offended, "I am not at all vexed at the little remarks which you thought fit to make: I am sure you were only acting conscientiously. Come, I will drink success to Salem!"

Success to Salem!" ejaculated Meagles filling his glass.

Of a surety I see no harm in drinking a pious toast," observed Mr. Sneaksby, to whom Mr. Paxwax had cast a look of anxious inquiry.

"Be it so," murmured the latter gentleman; and the glass were all drained in a moment.

"I now propose the health of our respected and esteemed friend the Rev. Nathaniel Sneaksby," said Meagles; "and in order to justice to the same, I further propose that we drink it in tumblers and not in paltry wine glasses."

"I cordially agree," said the Amazon

"Amen," murmured Mr. Ichabod Paxwax, having received a sign of approval from his spiritual chief; whereupon he filled a tumbler to the brim with the fruity old Port.

Meagles, the Amazon, and Mr. Paxwax, then imbibed their deep draughts to the honour of Mr. Sneaksby, who sate bolt upright in his chair endeavouring to screw his countenance into a complacent smile. When the ceremony was over, the reverend gentleman filled *his* tumbler almost to overflowing; and rising in a slow and solemn manner, he delivered the following address with that peculiar nasal twang and chaunting tone which had become habitual to him:—

"Christian friends, my heart boundeth like a young roe on the hill tops at the honour ye have done me.

For, alas! I am not ignorant of my own unworthiness, and how sinful a vessel I am. But obedient to that call which so mysteriously prompted me to found the sect of *New Lights*, each member paying threepence a week to the General Fund, a penny a week for Salem, and as much more as he chooses to give,—obedient to that call, I say, I have come before the world as the originator of a system which is calculated to reconcile all conflicting opinions by proclaiming unceasing hostility to those who refuse to join us. For we are a sect militant, and can tolerate no doctrines or sentiment save the ones which we profess. On this broad basis is our institution established: and most savoury and sole-refreshing is the consciousness of aiding in so good a work. Alas! long was I a miserable, miserable sinner! For years was I a wicked linen-draper, having thought but to make gains largely and expend them freely. My table groaned beneath the weight of luxuries—I was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. Never did my footsteps cross the threshold of church, chapel, or place of worship; and my vices, debaucheries, and immoralities were numerous as the hairs on my head. But alas! vengeance came in the shape of one of those unclean swine whom men call sheriff's officers; and my goods were all swept away—yea, vessels of gold and vessels of silver, and all the flesh-pots wherein I did vainly rejoice, were borne off to the auction-rooms and vended to the ungodly. Then for many weary months I sate me down in a debtor's gaol; and no friends came to see me in the gate. Naked and in want, I was turned forth upon the wide world; and, not having a human being to extend a helping hand towards me nor a morsel to put between my lips, I reflected in the bitterness of my spirit on the course which I ought to pursue. Then was it that a light dawned in upon my soul—I saw the error of my ways—I obeyed the call which at that moment I received—I set up my staff in an open place and addressed the multitude—and on that day the sect of *New Lights* sprang into existence. Such, dear Christian friends, is the outline of my career. My beloved brother in the good work, the esteemed and revered Ichabod Paxwax, who sitteth amongst us even now, was one of my earliest adherents. His life hath been chequered likewise: but our eyes

are open to the vanities of this world, and we are faithfully performing the mission for which we were destined and to perfect us for which we were so sorely chastened. Oh! my Christian brother Meagles—oh! my Christian sister Letitia—Lade—arise—gird up your loins—rapent—heap ashes upon your head—clothe yourself in sack cloth—put gold and silver into your pockets and come to Salem—and ye shall be numbered amongst us—yea, even amongst the elect!”

As Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby uttered these last words, with awful contortions of the countenance, rolling of the eyes, and up-raising of the arms, Mr. Ichabod Paxwax thought it only decent and becoming on his part to get up a little bye-play in the form of a gentle whimpering;—while Tim Meagles and the Amazon experienced the utmost difficulty to restrain themselves from bursting into violent peals of laughter.

The reverend gentleman, having brought his discourse to a conclusion, drained his tumbler and sate down, evidently well satisfied with the eloquence he had displayed and the impression he fancied that he had made.

“In the name of her ladyship and on my own account,” observed Meagles, assuming a very solemn demeanour, “I can only say that we shall certainly visit Salem next Sunday, and that we shall contribute our mite to so good a cause as that which you have propounded to us. For the present we can do nothing better than drink, in brimming tumblers, the health of our other new and esteemed friend Mr. Ichabod Paxwax.”

The face of the little gentleman, which had already acquired an additional rubicundity from the wine he had drunk, now became absolutely purple through excitement; and the toast having been duly honoured, he responded to the same in the following terms:—

“Dear brother Sneaksby and Christian friends, I thank you kindly. I’m a man of few words, but very capacious thoughts. My reverend leader in the good cause has given you a sketch of his life. I’ll give you mine. Inscrutable decrees made me adopt the cheesemongering and bacon line. Like brother Sneaksby, I made money rapidly—but spent it faster still. I mean I got into debt. My extravagance was wonderful; and I am not ashamed now, because I glory in the present

when compared with the past,—I am not ashamed now, I say, to confess that for a matter of twelve years I went to bed drunk every night of my life. Liquor was as necessary to me as vituals—or more so. Well, this couldn’t last—and it didn’t. The Philistines put executions into my house—the Ammonites took me to gaol. I was like Lazarus—but even worse; for I had no rich man’s crumbs to eat. Like brother Sneaksby again, I was turned adrift naked and in want. As I passed the tavern and ale-house, I would have given my soul for a draught of strong beer; I was sick unto death for a pint of ale. But I could obtain none. Being sore athirst, I entered the famous inn where I was wont to expend my gold: I craved credit for some drink—but the waiter thrust me forth into the street. I anathematised him in the bitterness of my spirit; and I denounced the tavern as a whitened sepulchre. Thus was my soul relieved of a part of the load that lay upon it. But still the thirst was torturing me; and I was fain to seek the pump to refresh my burning tongue. Then, as I drank the cold water which my stomach loathed, I felt like brother Sneaksby again—that I had a call. I heard of the *New Lights*—I repaired to Salem—and this revered gentleman at once took me to his home, and set steaks and bottled porter before me. Then I knew that a blessing attended upon the sect which he had founded; and I unhesitatingly joined it. Oh! my dear Mr. Meagles—my Christian sister, Lady Letitia Lade—with these striking examples before your eyes, can you hesitate to come amongst us? Most welcome will ye be—chosen vessels will ye prove—and the gold and silver which ye have promised to give unto Salem will help to redeem other lost creatures, even as such a miserable sinner as Ichabod Paxwax has been brought to redemption!”

With this eloquent and touching peroration, the pious gentleman drained his tumbler and sate down.

Meagles made a suitable response, and ended by proposing the health of Lady Lade. Again were the tumblers filled and emptied; and then the Amazon, having returned thanks, insisted that a similar compliment should be paid to her friend Meagles. The more they drank, the less hesitation did the pious gentlemen exhibit in drinking deeper draughts;—and what

with the toasts already enumerated, and others subsequently proposed and honoured, both Mr. Sneaksby and Mr. Paxwax were in a very comfortable condition indeed by the time Mrs. Piggleberry and Wasp served up the promised banquet.

The landlady seemed highly delighted to find her second floor lodger on such excellent terms with the occupant of her first storey; and Wasp appeared literally bursting with the mischievous propensities to which he did not however dare give vent in the presence of his master. One little freak he *did* perform all the same; and this was to tread with all his weight and force upon Mr. Ichabod Paxwax's toes—an incident for which he apologized with an appearance of the utmost sincerity, and which made that pious gentleman wriggle and twist for some moments in excruciating torture.

At length the turkey, the chine, and the mashed potatoes, flanked by foaming tankards of brown stout and sparkling ale, were duly spread upon the hospitable board; and Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby contrived to place himself close to the Amazon, on whose charms his eyes had been dwelling for the previous half-hour with a gloating earnestness that was only subdued by the vacancy of inebriety.

"Won't you ask a blessing brother Sneaksby?" said Mr. Ichabod Paxwax, his eyes watering with the pain so recently inflicted upon his corn, and his mouth watering likewise, but at the odour of the turkey.

"Hic—aye—verily, I was ob—liv—livious," responded the reverend gentleman; and, joining his hands, he muttered something which was so interspersed with "hics" that it was perfectly unintelligible.

Mr. Paxwax, however, seemed satisfied; and moaned forth a guttural "Amen" at the conclusion.

Tim Meagles now carved the turkey; and the pious gentlemen did honour to the repast. Nor did they spare the brown stout, of which they seemed particularly fond; and the heavy malt liquor, mixing with the wine which they had taken in no niggard quantities, produced such an effect upon them that while the one saw two Sneaksbys and ten candles, the other beheld two Paxwaxes and a dozen lights.

Meagles and the Amazon exchanged significant glances from time to time, testifying to each other how intensely

they enjoyed the evening's proceedings; and the mischievous pair kept filling the pious gentlemen's glasses the moment they were emptied.

"Brother Sneaksby," at length said the stout and red-faced saint, "I pre—he—hic—sume that we shall now—hic—wind—hic—up, with sing—ing—ing the—hic—dox—ox—ology."

"Hold your tongue, brother Paxwax—you're drunk!" exclaimed the reverend minister of Salem Chapel, who at the moment had begun to press his knee gently against the Amazon's.

"Drunk!—me drunk moaned the astounded Ichabod, falling back in his chair and lifting his hands in horrified amazement. "Brother Sne—eaks—hicby—did you mean that for me?"

"To be sure I did—hic," responded the reverend gentleman, darting a savage glance on his friend. "Drunk—beastly drunk, I say. Verily, Ich—hic—abod, thou hast likened thyself unto filthy swine!"

For a few seconds Mr. Paxwax gazed on his leader with the vacant stare of stupid astonishment: then, all on a sudden giving vent to his feelings in a hollow moan, he fell flat upon the floor.

"Dead drunk!" exclaimed Meagles; and Wasp being summoned to assist, the inebriated *New Light* was borne upstairs to his pious friend's chamber, where he was undressed and put to bed in a most hopeless state of intoxication.

But scarcely had the door closed behind.

Meagles and Wasp, as they carried Mr. Ichabod Paxwax away between them, when the Rev. Mr. Sneaksby, apparently regardless of his companion's fate turned towards Lady Letitia Lade: and, assuming as tender an expression as the peculiar configuration of his countenance and his own obfuscated ideas would permit, he said, "Yea, verily, sweet woman, thou art comely to—hic—look upon. But doth not that tight fitting coat compress—ess thy form—hic—somewhat inconveniently?"

"Oh! no in the least, I can assure you exclaimed the mischievous Amazon, allowing him to press his knee more closely still against her own, and bending upon him a look of encouragement.

"Of a surely I am surprised that thou art easy in such an attire," continued Mr. Sneaksby, leaning forward;

"methought it must be tight and even painful here."

And, as he spoke, he passed his arm round the Amazon's waist; then, flattering himself that as she only smiled gaily with her red lips and her wicked eyes, she was far from offended at his proceeding, he prepared to refresh himself with the luxury of a kiss.

But at the same moment the huntress raised her hand and dealt him such a smart and ringing box on the ears, that the pious gentleman was knocked clean off his chin and levelled as completely with the floor as his friend Ichabod had been, though from another cause, before him.

"Holloa! what's the matter?" exclaimed Meagles, returning to the room at the instant.

"Only the Rev. Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby making love to me," responded the Amazon, almost suffocating with the hilarious laughter in which she now indulged.

Meagles comprehended what had passed; and throwing himself on a seat, he gave way to an equally hearty burst of merriment.

Slowly and demurely did the minister of Salem Chapel rise from the carpet; and when he had gained his legs, his body swayed backward and forward for several moments before he could even steady himself by leaning on the back of his chair. First he gazed in a dull and vacant manner at Meagles—then his eyes settled in a similarly meaningless fashion upon Lady Letitia Lade;—and then he burst out into a hoarse laugh as the best means of covering his confusion.

"Come—resume your seat reverend sir," said the Amazon, with a good humoured smile; "and we shall be very excellent friends so long as you don't attempt to make love to me. Remember," she added archly, "I am a carnal creature—a woman of Babylon—and you must not render me worse."

Mr. Sneaksby looked particularly foolish—the more so because he was particularly drunk: but, cheered by the good natured manner in which Meagles now pressed him to wind up with a glass of whiskey and water, he accepted the invitation and poured the steaming punch down his throat as if it were anything rather than alcohol.

Presently an oath slipped from his tongue—then his conversation grew slightly loose and indecorous—and, having vociferated a bacchanalian

song by way of concluding the evening's entertainment, he staggered off to bed, with the emphatic declaration that "he'd be damned if he wouldn't denounce that infernal drunken scoundrel Paxwax next Sunday, from the pulpit of Salem Chapel."

CHAPTER LVII.

TEE OLD BAILEY.

At nine o'clock on the morning following the incidents just related, Martin and Ramsey were ushered by Superinto the dock of the criminal tribunal in the Old Bailey.

The weather was fine and frosty—and the sunbeams, illuminating the crisp fresh air, penetrated into the Court, as if by playing on the countenances of the accused they could diminish the ghastliness of their aspect.

The Grand Jury had already returned true bills of indictment against the prisoners: the petty jury had been sworn and were located in their box:—the Recorder was seated behind his little desk upon the bench, at one end of which a couple of Aldermen were lounging idly and conversing upon the grand entertainment given by the Lord Mayor on the previous day;—and the barristers were untying their bundles of briefs (sham ones in many instances) on the table around which they were placed.

The gallery and the body of the bail were crowded: for the circumstances connected with the case had produced a deep sensation—and many elegantly dressed ladies were present to hear the proceedings.

The two persons chiefly interested in the trial that was about to ensue, were care-worn, woe-begone, and overwhelmed with confusion. The train of thoughts that swept through their minds as they took their stand in the fatal dock, recalled to their remembrance the happy days of innocence which were gone, never to be renewed; and, now that it was too late, bitterly—bitterly did they curse the folly—the insanity—the madness which had hurried them into those ways of crime whence there was no retreating!

The usher proclaimed silence in the Court—the witnesses were ordered to withdraw—and the prisoners were

called upon to plead. To this demand Martin responded "Not guilty," in a faint and scarcely audible tone: but Ramsey, summoning all his courage to his aid by a desperate effort, gave the same reply in a firmer and louder voice.

The counsel for the prosecution then rose and addressed the jury.

He began by explaining that there were two separate indictments against the prisoners at the bar. The first charged them with forging certain powers of attorney, and with passing spurious coin into the circulation of this realm: the second accused them of conspiring to kidnap, carry off, and keep in confinement Sir Richard Stamford, baronet. It was on the former indictment that they were now charged; and on the allegations set forth therein were they to take the trial. The learned counsel went on to state the case at considerable length: but as we shall detail the evidence, it is unnecessary to give the opening speech.

Sir Richard Stamford was first summoned to the witness-box, which he entered with the air of a man determined to perform a painful duty: for, in the generosity of his heart, he even pitied the two wretches who had worked such deplorable and wholesale mischief against him. His appearance was the signal for a murmur of surprise and sympathy throughout the hall,—surprise at the great resemblance which he bore to the Prince of Wales—and sympathy on account of the misfortunes which he had endured.

Martin hung down his head through shame; and Ramsey, having darted one furtive glance at the man whom he had so deeply injured never once looked again towards the witness-box during the hour and a half that it was occupied by the baronet.

Sir Richard Stamford, in answer to the leading questions put by the counsel for the prosecution, recited most of those particulars with which the reader is already acquainted. He explained how he had first been induced to enter into partnership with the prisoners—the amounts he had invested in the bank—the trust he reposed in Martin and Ramsey—and the implicit belief which he put in their continual statements relative to the prosperity of the establishment. He went on to detail the circumstances which led him at last and all on a sudden to investigate

the books—the shock which he experienced on discovering the firm to be in a state of bankruptcy—and the conversation which he had overheard between Ramsey and Martin at the tavern at Aylesbury. In the course of that conversation Martin explained to his accomplice in iniquity how his visit to London had been attended with complete success, *and how the forgeries had been so skilfully executed that he experienced not the slightest difficulty in selling out the stock at the Bank of England.* Sir Richard Stamford proceeded onwards that Martin and Ramsey on the same occasion, congratulated each other on the good provision they had made for themselves: and that they alluded to a certain Joseph Warren, nick-named the Magsman, with whom they had previous dealings in respect to spurious coin. The baronet next explained the tragic scene which took place at the Manor, and which involved the suicidal attempt made by his wife—an act ultimately causing her death. He then related how he was kidnapped and conveyed to the dungeon in Thacker's Court—how he was required, as the price of his liberty to sign some paper with the contents of which he was not made acquainted—how he refused to affix his signature thereto—and how he escaped in a few days by the assistance of a certain Mr. Page. Lastly, Sir Richard Stamford explained how he had sought and obtained an interview with his wife in her last moments—how he had pardoned her for all her sinfulness towards him—how she had confessed her guilt, in the presence of a magistrate who attended at her death-bed on purpose to receive her statement—and how with her last breath she had proclaimed her husband's innocence of all the misdeeds imputed to him.

The Buckinghamshire justice of the peace who was present, as just described, at Lady Stamford's death, was the second witness examined. A paper was put into his hand; and he declared it to be the depositions which he had taken down from the dying woman's lips. The contents went far to confirm Martin and Ramsey's guilt in respect of the misappropriation of the funds at the bank, and likewise to prove her husband's innocence in that respect. With regard to the forgeries and the issue of spurious coin the document said little; as Lady Stamford had never been made acquainted with those facts by her paramour Ramsey:

but the paper set forth, that when Sir Richard accused Ramsey of those crimes, on the memorable night at the Manor, he did not attempt to deny them.

The next witness called was Mr. Peter Grumely, the police-officer. He deposed to the capture of the prisoners effected in the manner already known to the readers; and on being shown a certain paper, he declared that he had discovered it in a cupboard when searching the house in Thacker's Court. This paper set forth that Sir Richard Stamford conveyed all his property to Martin and Ramsey for the benefit of the creditors of the bank; that he acknowledged to have committed certain frauds and forgeries, which he implored them to settle in order to rescue his name from infamy; that on those conditions he would depart to America, with the express understanding that he was never to return to England; and that five hundred a year were to be allowed him for the rest of his life by the aforesaid Martin and Ramsey. This paper, which was drawn up in the handwriting of Ramsey (as proved by another witness), was without date or signature, and was evidently the one which it was sought to coerce Sir Richard Stamford into signing when he was imprisoned in the dungeon.

Mr. Page was now summoned to the box, which he entered with a smirking self-sufficient air; and, having complacently surveyed both judge and jury, he proceeded to answer the questions put to him by the counsel for the prosecution. He explained that, being entrapped into the power of certain villains, he was incarcerated in the same dungeon with Sir Richard Stamford—that they escaped thence—and that accident had thrown into his hand a document which had already been adduced in evidence at the police-court. This was a letter addressed to *Joseph Warren, at the Beggar's Staff, Horslydown*; and it was likewise proved (in the course of the trial) to be in Ramsey's handwriting. We recapitulate its contents, as being a necessary link in the chain of evidence, although they are already known to the reader.

"March, 17th, 1794.

"The terms are accepted. A Bank-note for a hundred pounds is enclosed in this letter. You will acknowledge the receipt thereof, directing your reply, as heretofore, to Mr. M—,

putting 'private' in the corner outside, take three thousand in the first instance, and three thousand more this day six months. You will pack the goods up in a square deal-box, the boards of which must be at least three quarters of an inch thick; and the lid must be well nailed down. Book it per carrier: and print, '*G. and Co.*' in the corner of the card of address. On receipt of the box, the other hundred pound-note shall be duly forwarded."

The next witness examined on the present occasion was the cashier of the late banking establishment at Aylesbury. He proved the handwriting of the document found in the house at Thacker's Court, and that of the letter addressed to Joseph Warren: it was Mr. Ramsey's. The cashier went on to show that Sir Richard Stamford never interfered with the business, and never overdraw his own private account. He perfectly well recollected the arrival of a box containing gold, or alleged to contain gold, about the commencement of the Spring of the previous year (1794). The contents were three thousand guineas, or what he (the cashier) took to be guineas; and Mr. Martin himself mixed them up with several thousands of guineas previously in the safe. The whole was paid away in due course. He thought the box came from Coutts and Co., the London agents of the bank.

The next witness was a clerk in the Bank of England. This gentleman proved that extensive forgeries had been committed on that establishment: powers of attorney authorising the sale of stock invested in the names of several persons, had been acted upon by Mr. Martin who was in the habit of receiving the dividends for that stock. These powers of attorney were forgeries. Mr. Martin had attended at the Bank with a stock broker to effect the sales and receive the proceeds.

Two or three witnesses were then called to prove that they had never signed their names to the powers of attorney just alluded to: nor had they in any way authorised the sale of the stock specified therein.

This closed the case for the prosecution; and a barrister, who had been retained for the purpose, entered upon the defence of the two prisoners. But, although a man of great talent, he could not grapple with the stubborn facts which had been adduced. The

forgery, at all events, was completely made out: and the learned gentleman was compelled to do the best he could for his clients in the shape of sophistry, specious declamation, and impassioned appeal to the jury. At the conclusion of his speech, he called several witnesses to testify to the characters of the accused; and this course gave the prosecuting counsel the right of reply—a privilege which is detestable in the estimation of all humane men, but which in political cases serves the purposes of despotic Ministers and blood-thirsty Attorneys-General most admirably.

The Recorder summed up the evidence with firmness and impartiality. In fact judges are nearly always honest and dispassionate save in such instances as those to which we have alluded; and then, with but few exceptions, they are the rank and unblushing partizans of the Government.

It was five o'clock in the evening of this memorable day, when the jury retired to deliberate in their private room.

For upwards of half-an-hour they remained absent;—and during this interval the prisoners exhibited a nervous anxiety which, guilty though they assuredly were, was piteous to behold. Martin's countenance was ghastly pale; and, as he was advanced in years, the spectacle which he presented to the view was one that might well engender sympathy. Ramsey vainly endeavoured to appear firm; his quivering lip—the frequent spasmodic movements of his arms—the occasionally wild glaring of his eyes—the twitching of the flesh at the corners of his eyes—and the glances which he threw every other moment towards the door by which the jury had left their box—and these were indications of a soul-crushing suspense and an appalling terror.

At length that door opened—and the jury men returned into the Court. Slowly and solemnly—like men who were about to take part in a funeral ceremony—did they resume their seat. All eyes were fixed upon them—a pin might have been heard to drop—the breath of every one present was suspended.

In the minute that elapsed between the re-appearance of the jury and the delivery of their verdict by the foreman, the two prisoners lived whole centuries of indescribable anguish—

passed through the bitterness of ten thousand deaths.

Scenes of the busy world without flashed through their minds: all the pleasures, delights, and enjoyments of existence swept across their imaginations with a pageantry the brilliancy of which was heightened a myriad times by the contrast which their own awful condition presented.

Could they be doomed to die?—oh! no—it was impossible! What earthly power could snatch them away from existence?—what human hand dared grasp the fatal thunderbolts of immortal Jove to hurl at them?

It appears a dream—a whirling, maddening, horrible dream,—frightful and appalling vision from which they would presently awake to the consciousness of its delusion and their own safety!

But—Ah!—what is that dreadful word which has just stricken their ears?

“GUILTY!”—Oh! it is no dream—no vision: it is a fearful reality:—they are awake—and they are *there*!

Yes: the jury have given in their verdict;—and the Recorder places the black cap upon his head.

The Clerk of the Court calls the prisoners by their names: he inquires of them whether they have any reason to allege why sentence of death should not be pronounced upon them!

Reasons!—yes—ten thousand reasons. For the one is old man who has but a few years to live in the ordinary course of nature, and it would be shocking to deprive him of that sort, that trifling, that poor insignificant span: the other is young, in the prime of life, and with the vigorous constitution that promises half a century more of existence in this world! Oh! these facts suggests myriad reasons wherefore they should not be doomed to die!

But their tongues cleave to the roofs of their mouths—they cannot utter a word—they cannot give vent to a single syllable: and yet they have so much to say!

An awful consternation is upon them; the lights in the Court appear to burn blue—the faces that are turned from all sides towards the dock, seem ghastly and hideous—the human beings by whom they are surrounded, assume spectral shapes to their imagination—the jury look like twelve fiends—the very judge is the arch-demon in their eyes.

Hark!—what are those solemn words

which now break upon the awful stillness that had followed the crier's proclamation for silence?

'Tis the death-sentence which the Recorder is pronouncing.

But the prisoners cannot understand what he says: their brain is whirling fearfully—the lights are dancing before their eyes—spectral forms seem to be gathering in around them. Nevertheless, they can comprehend this much—that *they are doomed to be hanged by the neck until they are dead*; and the judge winds up the barbarian sentence by invoking *the Almighty to have mercy upon their souls*.

The turnkey touches them upon the shoulder: they mechanically follow him away from the dock—and in a few minutes Martin is the tenant of one condemned cell and Ramsey of another.

It being now past six o'clock the Recorder quitted the Court, to join the Sheriffs, the Ordinary, the Governor of Newgate, and some of the barristers, at the dinner table: and the common Serjeant took his seat upon the bench.

Stephen Price (*alias* the Big Beggarman) and Briggs were then placed in the dock.

They were charged with having kidnapped and detained in unlawful custody Sir Richard Stamford and Mr. Page; and, the case being thoroughly proved against them, they were sentenced to transportation for fifteen years.

With this trial the proceedings of the session terminated.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE DUCHESS AND THE COUNTESS.

IT was between three and four o'clock in the afternoon—and while Martin and Ramsey were in the presence of their judge—that a lady alighted from a splendid equipage at the door of the Earl of Desborough's mansion in Berkeley Square. She was immediately ushered with great respect to one of the magnificent drawing-rooms belonging to that dwelling: and while she is waiting there until the Countess makes her appearance, we will indulge in a few words descriptive of her personal charms.

And, charming she assuredly was, although in the thirty-eighth year of her age. Nature had lavished all her choicest gifts upon her form; and,

though her countenance habitually wore a smiling sweetness of expression, yet there was an air of voluptuousness about her, surrounding and enveloping her as with a halo, that engendered undefinable sensations in the breast of the beholder—as if it were from love that she had borrowed the impress of her witching beauty!

Her hair was of a rich auburn, which wanted in a thousand glossy and shining ringlets upon her shoulders, and gave her so youthful an appearance that, when it was thus arranged, she seemed to have scarcely reached her thirtieth year. Her eyes were large and of a deep hazel hue,—sometimes languishing and tender—at others lustrous with an overwhelming light,—sometimes with love beaming in every glance—at others flashing with the natural but latent haughtiness of a proud disposition.

Her complexion was of the purest white, save where on each plump and well-rounded cheek it blushed into the rose's-hue; and her lips, full but not thick, were of the brightest coral. Her teeth were small, beautifully white, and faultlessly even; and, when she laughed, it appeared as if they were musical pearls that thus sent forth a delicious, soft, and silvery sound.

Her figure was on a large scale, but admirably proportioned, the fulness of the bust setting off the wasp-like symmetry of the waist: her arms were robust, but stainlessly white and exquisitely rounded,—and the graceful majesty of her walk indicated the fine and well-modelled length of limb which imparted to her gait its classic elegance and statuesque dignity.

Such was Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire—the idol of that sphere of fashion over which she presided with unquestioned sway, and from which she received all the blandishments of flattery and all the homage of worship and devotion.

Throwing herself upon a sofa with the ease and familiarity of one who knew and felt that she was in the abode of an intimate friend, the brilliant Duchess waited until Lady Desborough made her appearance; and when the latter entered the room after a few minutes' delay, their greeting was reciprocally cordial.

"Dearest Georgiana," said the Countess, "I am delighted to see you. It is an age since we last met."

"Nearly six months, Eleanor," responded the Duchess of Devonshire.

"My tour in Scotland has been protracted beyond my original expectations; but at length, behold me once more in happy London. I only returned with his Grace last evening—and my first visit is paid to you."

"Your friendship, dear Georgiana, is most soothing and consolatory to me," said the Countess of Desborough, an involuntary sigh escaping her bosom.

"Heavens! you are unhappy," exclaimed the Duchess of Devonshire, taking Eleanor's hand and pressing it affectionately. "Tell me, my beloved friend—what is the matter with you?—wherefore do you sigh?"

"Oh! it is nothing—nothing, I can assure you," answered the Countess, hastily. "But I have been somewhat indisposed to-day—a partial headache—"

"My dearest Eleanor, this excuse would pass current with a mere acquaintance," interrupted her Grace; "but not with a sincere—a very sincere friend. Recollect Eleanor, we have known each other since our childhood, I might almost say—notwithstanding there is a difference of ten years between my age and yours. Therefore, as an elder sister do I speak to you—for as a sister I love you, Eleanor."

"How can I sufficiently testify my gratitude for these generous expressions?" exclaimed the Countess of Desborough.

"By making me the confidant of your secret sorrow," was the prompt answer; "for a secret sorrow am I assured that you cherish. But imagine not for an instant, Eleanor, that a base and contemptible feeling of curiosity urges me thus to address you. Intimate as I have been with you—devoted in our friendship as we are towards each other—this is the first time that I have ever ventured to touch upon so delicate a topic. Often and often have I beheld you pensive—thoughtful—melancholy—unhappy; and I have longed to throw my arms round your neck, and implore you to confide your sorrows to me, that I might sympathise and console. Six years have now passed since you became the Countess of Desborough—and I know that the alliance which you have formed has not ensured your felicity. Nay—this much is no secret with the world generally; but the cause is unsuspected—unknown—beyond all power of conjecture. To me, I con-

fess, it is the gratest of mysteries: for the noble earl, your husband, appears to possess every qualification adopted to render your existence a paradise and win your best affections. Tell me, then, dearest Eleanor—tell your sincerest and most attached friend the source of your sorrow. Perhaps I may be enabled to counsel and advise: at all events I am certain to sympathise with you and offer such consolation as it may be in my power to impart."

"The world, then, is aware that his lordship and myself dwell not together in the sweet harmony of matrimonial bliss?" said the Countess of Desborough, casting down her looks, while a deep carnation suffered her clear olive cheeks.

"Such is indeed the case, Eleanor," returned Georgiana. "But, understand me well—the world attributes no blame to you—your reputation is unsullied—scandal has never dared to whisper a syllable against you."

"Oh! it would be cruel indeed if it were otherwise!" exclaimed Eleanor with a degree of bitterness which surprised her friend. "But pray let us change the conversation—let us pass to some other topic."

"Have you no faith in friendship?" asked the Duchess of Devonshire, in a gentle tone of reproach: "can you not conceive that by unbosoming yourself to me, you will be consoled and comforted? Or do you fancy that the giddy whirl of pleasure and fashionable dissipation has rendered me so thoroughly heartless—"

"Oh! no—no!" interrupted the Countess, shocked by the cruel suspicion thus implied: "I know that you are everything kind—generous—affectionate—"

"Then you will trust me?—you will confide in me?" said Georgiana, her tone assuming the tenderness of the most unfeigned friendship. "You do not require from my lips the assurance that your secret, whatever it may be, will rest as a sacred deposit in my bosom—never, never to be revealed."

"I know not what to say!" exclaimed Eleanor, clasping her hands in a sudden paroxysm of anguish, while a tear rolled down each blushing cheek. "I am bewildered, Georgiana—I am uncertain how to act! Your kindness prompts me to unbosom myself without reserve; but, on the other hand, feelings which I cannot explain—"

"Oh! you are indeed unhappy, my sweet friend," interrupted her Grace; "and yet you hesitate to allow me the means of sympathising with you! Eleanor, this is cruel—this is unjust—for you are well aware that since you were eight years old and I was eighteen, our attachment to each other has never been for a moment marred by a harsh word or a cold look."

"This is true—most true," murmured the Countess of Desborough; "and were I to make any one a confidant of the secret sorrow which, I admit, weighs upon my heart, that friend would be yourself."

"Is it possible that you can love another?—that you hate your husband for that other's sake?" ejaculated the Duchess, a sudden idea striking her.

"No—no," responded the Countess of Desborough; then, in an altered and far more solemn tone, she added, "Never yet have I felt what love is!"

"You did not love the Earl when you married him?" exclaimed Georgiana, profoundly surprised. "This, then, was at least a secret which you kept from me. But surely his conduct must have been such as to win your affections?—surely he cannot seem tender, loving, and attentive in public, and ill-treat you in private?"

"Not for worlds would I have you think so ill of Francis!" cried the Countess, emphatically. "No—he has surrounded me with all the elements of that happiness which gold can procure; and his constant study is to render my life as agreeable as it may be."

"This mystery is incomprehensible!" said the Duchess. "I am pained—grieved to the inmost recesses of my heart—to think that my best friend should be unhappy, and that she should fear to entrust me with the cause of her sorrow."

"You know not how I long—how ardently I crave to unbosom myself to you, dearest Georgiana," returned the Countess, bending upon her companion those eyes which were usually so brilliant and lustrous, but which were now so mournful and melting. "Your words have already penetrated like a balm into my soul—the tender sympathy which you have manifested towards me has done me good. Yes—the love of a dear friend must be an incalculable relief; but it would kill me to think that this friend should ever have cause to blush for her in

whose behalf she has shown such generous feelings."

"I blush for you, Eleanor!" exclaimed the Duchess, more and more astonished at this species of self-accusation on the part of the Countess: "Oh! that were impossible! I know you to be virtue itself."

"But is there not the sin of the thoughts as well as of the actions?" inquired Eleanor, in a subdued and mournful tone, "Alas! since the confession must be made—and I see that I cannot resist the influence which prompts me now to unbosom my soul to you—"

"Speak freely—fearlessly," said the Duchess, observing that her friend still hesitated. "It will prove one of the most delicious moments of my life if I can in any way soothe the secret sorrow which you cherish."

"Ere now, my beloved Georgiana," resumed the Countess, "you complimented me by saying that I was virtue itself. But you know not how unworthy I am of the good opinion which you have thus formed of me! It is true that if the chastity of the body be all that required to constitute virtue, I am indeed virtuous. But may not a polluted soul dwell in a chaste body, even as a pure soul may inhabit a body that is polluted? The woman whose honour is violently wrested from her by the miscreant ravisher, is still chaste in mind though tainted in person: and, on the other hand, the woman who is even a virgin in bodily innocence may be a very Messalina in passions, cravings, and desires. Do you understand me, my dear friend?" asked the Countess, without raising her head, but with a burning blush suffusing her entire countenance and pouring its crimson glow over her neck, her shoulders, and her bosom.

"I understand that you have involved yourself in a net of sophistry and metaphysical argument which cannot regard yourself," responded the Duchess. "It is true that virtue may be a negative quality only, in some instances; but as you have already assured me that you love no man, you have no possible inducement to prove faithless to your husband. Were you enamoured of some handsome youth, and were you on that account wrestling against temptation, it would not be difficult to comprehend your position."

"And then, perhaps, the crime were more venial than when the soul has to combat with passions and cravings

which have no particular object to excite them," murmured Eleanor, covering her countenance with her hands.

"I understand you at length!" whispered the Duchess of Devonshire, leaning towards her friend on whose shoulder she placed her hand: you are upon those unhappy terms with your husband which deprive you of the enjoyment of conjugal rites—and you are not of a temperament to allow so saint-like an existence to be even tolerable. If this be the case, Eleanor, you need not blush to avow it—for I candidly admit that the result of such privation would be the same with me."

"And yet we are so differently situated," exclaimed the Countess, raising her blushing face timidly towards that of the brilliant and voluptuous Georgiana: "for as yet you have only obtained an insight into a portion of my secret—you have only learnt the least and most insignificant part of my weakness. Alas! you alluded to the unhappy terms on which I exist with my husband: but you have yet to hear and be amazed at the cause of that severance which scarcely veiled by the mockery of our living, beneath the same roof,"

"And this cause—what can it be?" asked Georgiana, taking her friend's hand pressing it between both her own.

The Countess of Desborough hesitated upwards of a minute: she was evidently afraid of giving a reply to the question—and she was unable to find language wherewith to frame that answer. But suddenly calling all her courage to aid her in achieving a confession which had gone thus far, she placed her lips to the ears of the Duchess, and hastily whispered a few words.

The magnificent Georgiana started as if a serpent had stung her—so amazed was she by the extraordinary and unexpected revelation which she had thus heard: but Eleanor, devoured with shame, and unable to endure the look of mingled incredulity, surprise, and compassion which the Duchess fixed upon her, threw herself on the bosom of her friend, and, concealing her burning countenance, there, gave vent to her feelings in a flood of tears.

"My poor Eleanor, be comforted," at length said the Duchess of Devonshire: "it is not grief which you should pour forth—but vengeance which you should crave."

"No—no: not vengeance," sobbed

the generous-souled Countess: "for he has done all that mortal could to make amends for a flagrant wrong. Alas!" she continued, raising her head, and casting down the eyes on the long lashes of which trembled the pearly drops; "I hate and detest myself when I think that such a circumstance should embitter my days. But vainly, vainly do I struggle with those passions which consume me—those desires which rage at times so furiously in my bosom!"

"Eleanor, you are an angel of virtue, whereas you would represent yourself to be a demoness of profligate thoughts and wanton ideas!" exclaimed Georgiana. "There is something more than a negative virtue in your chastity—your forbearance—your purity! But, believe me," added the Duchess emphatically,—"believe me when I declare that you will continue to exist the veriest simpleton in Europe, if you thus adhere to that virtue which is nothing more nor less than a sentimentalism so highly refined and so marvellously sublimated as to be incompatible with the grossness of even the purest mortal nature."

"What would you advise me, Georgiana?" asked the Countess, trembling with an undefinable sensation of mingled terror and delight—terror at the idea of being tempted into evil, and delight at the thought of the evil into which she was thus to be tempted.

"I would regard what you term virtue as a chain and would cast it off," was the unhesitating and emphatic response.

"Oh! I regret now that I have made you my confidant," exclaimed Eleanor: "for you give form and substance to those ideas the existence of which in my own heart I have never until now dared to acknowledge to myself!"

"You are a perfect phenomenon, Eleanor," returned the Duchess. "But I have a great mind to tell you a little secret of my own—for I also have a secret, I can assure you," she added, with an arch smile of ineffable sweetness.

"Oh! but your secret is not one that gives you pain, and that you blush to own!" said the Countess.

"It certainly gives me no pain," rejoined the Duchess of Devonshire: "and yet I may perhaps blush as I reveal it to you. But if I make you my confidant in that respect, it is only to prove to you that I really regard you in the light of a sister."

"And this secret?" said Eleanor her curiosity being raised.

"It is explained in a few words," was the response. "I have a lover!"

"Doubtless! Worshipped and adorned as you are, Georgiana," said the comparatively unsophisticated Countess, "you have hundreds. But a lover in any other sense of the term——"

"Yes—a lover in *that* sense," interrupted the Duchess. "I mean that I have yielded to a phantasy—a whim—a wanton caprice—and have erred without one hundredth part of the excuse which you would have for erring in a similar manner.

"Is this possible, Georgiana?" exclaimed the Countess, with an astonishment most real and unfeigned.

"It is true, I can assure you," answered the profligate patrician. "And now are you not ashamed of me?"

"No: I begin to see things in a new light," rejoined Eleanor, gradually becoming familiarised with the contemplation of immorality; and when she remembered that the Princess Sophia herself had yielded to the lights of illicit love, she wondered that she should ever have adhered so rigidly to her own virtuous principles.

"It is not a year ago," continued the Duchess, "that I succumbed to that phantasy and became faithless to my husband. I was seated alone, and in a pensive mood, on a sofa in the Red Drawing-room at Devonshire House. It was between four and five in the afternoon. Presently the door was thrown open—and a visitor was announced. You know him well: he is one of the handsomest men in Europe. He seated himself by my side upon the sofa—and a conversation on various interesting topics progressed for some little time. At length I observed that he was surveying me with an earnest attention—an attention which at the moment I fancied to amount almost to rudeness; and the blood rushed to my cheeks. He threw himself on his knees before me—took my hand—pressed it to his lips—and declared that if he had offended me, he would never rise until he had obtained my pardon."

"How singular!" ejaculated the Countess, "Something very much resembling all this, occurred to myself about three weeks ago. Yes—I also was seated alone and in a pensive mood—in this very room, and on this very sofa—and a visitor came: he is certainly one of the handsomest men

in England—and you know him well——But pray continue your narrative, my dear friend," cried Eleanor, suddenly interrupting herself in the midst of the broken explanations which she was giving in a mood of almost involuntary musing.

"Well—as I was observing," resumed the Duchess, "my visitor vowed that he would not rise until I pardoned him—which I hastened to do, although, if questioned, I could scarcely have defined the offence which he had committed. Placing himself again by my side, he dexterously and with amazing artifice continued the discourse in such a manner, that he gradually brought it to a point at which he suddenly, and as if in a burst of unconquerable enthusiasm, declared his admiration—his passion—his love. I know not what reply I made: but I recollect well that in another moment I was clasped in his arms——"

"More singular still!" ejaculated the Countess. "The adventure which I considered to be so insulting to myself, was precisely the same."

"But the results were assuredly very different," returned the Duchess: "for whereas you must have passed pure and immaculate through the ordeal, I accepted the declaration of love—and that same evening I visited Carlton House privately and in disguise."

"Carlton House!" exclaimed Eleanor, with increasing wonderment.

"Yes—for the lover to whom I have alluded is the Prince of Wales," rejoined Georgiana.

"And it was the Prince of Wales who would have made a victim of me!" cried the Countess.

"Then is it most singular that my love-story should have elicited yours, the hero being the same," said the Duchess by no means chagrined at this proof of her royal paramour's fickleness. "I am not jealous of the Prince: it were ridiculous to be so. I am well aware that his love adventures are innumerable; and if I were to sigh each time I learn that I have a rival in his caprices—for we will not call them affections—I should be only making myself miserable from morning to night."

"True!" murmured Eleanor, in whose bosom new and exciting thoughts had been engendered by all that the Duchess of Devonshire had said to her on this occasion.

"And therefore, my dear friend," added the wanton and voluptuous

Georgiana, "if you should think fit to lend a willing ear to the Prince's seductive words, I shall not experience the slightest annoyance. But I must now say farewell, Eleanor—and I shall expect to see you at Devonshire House in the course of to-morrow or next day: or I must assuredly become your tutress and guide into the realms of pleasure. Adieu, my dear friend."

With these words, the Duchess embraced Lady Desborough, and took her departure.

Eleanor had escorted her Grace as far as the landing outside the apartment;—and, as she was returning slowly and in a thoughtful mood to her seat upon the sofa, it suddenly flashed to her mind like a glare of lightning, that if any one had happened to be in the inner drawing-room it were easy to have overheard some portion, if not the whole of preceding conversation, the two saloons being only separated from each other by folding-doors.

"A terrible sickness seized upon the heart of the Countess as this source of alarm sprang up in her mind: and opening one of the doors, she entered the adjacent apartment.

But a vertigo appeared to fasten upon her brain when she caught sight of her husband—yes, the Earl of Desborough—seated at the table apparently bending over a book, and with his back towards her.

She staggered a few paces and was on the point of falling; but in a moment she perceived the tremendous precepice on which she stood—in an instant she saw the necessity of gathering all her courage and presence of mind to her aid, if she wished to relieve herself from a state of awful suspense and ascertain whether he had actually overheard her conversation with the Duchess, or not.

"What! are you here?" she said, in a faint and faltering tone, advancing at the same time and laying her hand upon his shoulder.

"Ah! my dearest Eleanor," he exclaimed, starting up: *but it struck her that he was very pale!*

"Have you been here long?" she asked, her tone becoming still more tremulous, and her entire frame quivering like an aspen leaf.

"Yes—that is, not many minutes," he replied, instantly correcting his first mono-syllabic answer. "I have been reading that book, and was so absorbed in its contents that I really

forgot how long I could have been here."

And he smiled—but, as it struck her, *with a ghastly attempt to conceal horrible thoughts!*

"What book is it?" she inquired, hastily bending down her head to hide the shame which flushed her cheeks—and not shame only, but torturing terror of the most agonising nature.

No pen can describe the exquisite acuteness to which her feelings were now wrought up, when she saw that the volume lying open on the table was upside down! The barbed point of a lance thrust into her heart and then torn violently out again—supposing that it were possible to live through such an infernal process of cruelty—could not have been accompanied with an anguish more rending than that which the unhappy lady now felt. Her brain was on fire—molten lead was circulating in her veins—the tortures of hell were lacerating her soul.

But suddenly it flashed to her imagination that her husband might have turned the book in this manner at the moment when he started from his seat at the words which she had addressed to him and on feeling her hand upon his shoulder. Revived by the hope, which was instantly followed by the thought if he *had* overheard her conversation with the Duchess it would be impossible for him to appear even as cool and collected as he was, Eleanor raised her countenance again, saying, "Were you not aware that an old friend of mine was with me just now? She would have been delighted to see you."

"Yes—I understood that you had company—the Duchess of Devonshire, was it not?" observed the Earl, in a tone which struck the Countess, *in a ominously peculiar and unnatural*, "But I did not choose to disturb," he added, almost immediately: "besides, I do not feel very well this afternoon."

"Has anything occurred to vex or annoy you, Francis?" inquired the Countess: and, as she spoke, she darted a rapid but searching—scrutinising—penetrating glance upon her husband's countenance.

"Annoy me! Oh! nothing—nothing I can assure you, dear Eleanor," he exclaimed, taking her hand and carrying it to his lips: then, instantly dropping it—and, as she thought at least, with singular abruptness, as if it had suddenly become loathsome to

him after his mouth had thus touched it—he said, “No—I have nothing to annoy me—unless it be the perverse conduct of Fernanda, in so obstinately refusing the reparation which Arthur Eleanor so honourably offered. Have you seen Fernanda to-day?”

“She has kept her room, as you know, almost ever since her return home a few days ago,” answered Eleanor, gradually becoming reassured, though still experiencing an oppressive uneasiness—for she could not subdue the idea that there *was* something remarkably strange, forced, and unnatural in her husband’s manner.

At this moment a domestic entered to announce that dinner was served.

The Earl instantly proffered Eleanor his arm; and, as he escorted her to the dining-room below, he turned the conversation on some leading topic of the day, and which was quite distinct from their own concerns: then, after they were seated at table, he continued to discourse in the same strain, and with a better flow of spirits than he was accustomed to enjoy. The result was that Eleanor’s apprehensions gradually subsided, until they passed away altogether;—and, feeling convinced that her husband had *not* overheard anything which occurred between herself and the Duchess of Devonshire, she concluded that what she had fancied to be an ominous singularity of manner on his part was only the work of her own fevered imagination and guilty conscience.

For Eleanor *did* look upon the revelation which she had made to the Duchess and the thoughts to which she had yielded subsequently, as crimes which she had committed!

CHAPTER LIX.

THE COUNTESS AND THE MILLINER.

BETWEEN eleven and twelve o’clock on the following morning, Mrs. Brace, attended by a young person dressed in mourning, alighted from a hackney-coach at the door of the Earl of Desborough’s mansion in Berkeley Square.

The young person just alluded to, carried a large band-box in her hand: for, being the junior assistant in Mrs. Brace’s establishment, it was her duty

to accompany her mistress on such occasions as the present. She however remained below in a species of waiting-room opening from the hall, while the milliner, taking the band-box, ascended to the bed-chamber of the Countess.

Eleanor, having passed a restless and feverish night, had not long risen from her couch. Dressed in a charming *deshabillee*, she was half-reclining in a capacious arm-chair near the fire, and playing with rather than partaking of the cup of chocolate which stood on a little table at her right hand.

Her raven hair was negligently gathered up into bands, the rich masses of which framed with ebony her spotless forehead: she was pale—and an appearance of languor was expressed on her countenance, and pervaded her entire form.

The lady’s maid, having ushered in Mrs. Brace, immediately retired: and the milliner was left alone with the Countess.

“I had really forgotten my appointment with you this morning,” said the latter.

“If it will suit your ladyship better, I can easily call again,” answered Mrs. Brace, in her most dulcet tones.

“No—I would not give you so much trouble, since you have come on purpose,” rejoined the Countess. “Have you brought the purple velvet dress—”

“I am invariably punctual in executing your ladyship’s commands,” observed the milliner.

As she thus spoke, she laid aside her bonnet and scarf and proceeded to open the band-box. First she took out several beautiful lace caps, which she carefully placed upon the bed; and then she drew forth a superb velvet dress, made in accordance with a fashion which she herself had artistically devised and which she hoped, through the aid of the brilliant Countess of Desborough, to bring into vogue.

Rising from her seat, and slowly divesting herself of the elegant morning wrapper which she wore, Eleanor proceeded to try on the new dress in front of a *psyche*, or full length looking glass, which reflected her fine figure on its polished surface. Indeed, as she thus stood for a few moments, with her exquisitely shaped shoulders, her beautiful neck, and her well-rounded arms completely bare,—with the closely fitting but not tightly-laced

corset setting off her symmetry, and developing every contour,—and with her feet and ankles, up to the swell of the leg, appearing below the short petticoat, she seemed a perfect model of loveliness; and Mrs. Brace could not help thinking at the time that it was indeed no wonder if the Prince of Wales burnt so ardently to possess her.

The velvet robe was tried on—and it fitted admirably. The low body revealed half the bust—the arms were left bare almost to the very shoulders, where the miniature sleeves were looped up with rows of pearls—and from the waist the glossy skirt flowed in massive folds, shining with a lustrous richness where the light from the windows fell upon them, and deeply dark in the shades between.

"You are really a most accomplished *artiste* in your profession," said the Countess of Desborough, well pleased with the result of the experiment, and surveying herself in the glass not altogether without a feeling of vanity—for she saw that she was handsome—gloriously handsome; and the thought raised up a glow of pride to her cheeks so pale before.

"I thank your ladyship for the compliment," returned Mrs. Brace, whose full and largely rounded form presented a voluptuous contrast with the elegant, graceful, and dignified loveliness of the patrician. "Permit me to observe that this dress suits your ladyship admirably: it will undulate with every movement and thereby become almost as expressive as gestures."

"Your art, then, has its mysteries as well as those which are acknowledged to be of a more complex nature," said the Countess of Desborough, with a smile.

"Your ladyship perhaps is unaware how much depends upon the dress," returned the milliner. "The most faultless shape may be rendered faulty thereby: and it should be made so as to accompany, as it were, each and every motion of the form, as if it were a part thereof. The great secrets of the art are to do justice to a fine figure, and improve a bad one."

"You should write a treatise upon the mysteries of that art, Mrs. Brace," said the Countess, smiling again at the information which her milliner was imparting.

"Pardon me, my lady," responded the latter: "but these are secrets, which must not be published to the

world in general. Oh! I can assure your ladyship that Mrs. Fitzherbert, her Grace of Devonshire, Lady Jersey, and many others of my most eminent patronesses often condescend to listen to me while I explain these things."

"Ah! you are employed by Mrs. Fitzherbert, Lady Jersey, and my dear friend the Duchess of Devonshire?" said the Countess in a musing tone—for it struck her as being singular that Mrs. Brace should have mentioned by name three ladies who were intimately connected with the Prince of Wales.

"Such is the fact, I can assure your ladyship," answered the milliner. "And perhaps your ladyship will excuse me for mentioning that his Royal Highness the heir-apparent never fancies any dress worn by Mrs. Fitzherbert, unless made at my establishment."

"Is his Royal Highness so excellent a connoisseur in respect to lady's attire?" asked Eleanor, as she laid aside her new velvet dress and, resuming her morning-wrapper, threw herself languidly back again into the large arm-chair—her pretty feet imprisoned in elegant slippers, now resting on an ottoman.

"Since your ladyship puts the question to me," responded Mrs. Brace thus ingeniously directing the discourse towards the topic on which she was anxious to touch,— "I will unhesitatingly inform you that his Royal Highness is not only an excellent judge to such matters, but that he volunteers his opinion on many points at those times when I have the honour to wait on Mrs. Fitzherbert in order to submit the latest fashions to her. Would your ladyship be offended if I were to confess that Mrs. Fitzherbert has seen your velvet robe, and highly approves of it?"

"Oh! certainly I cannot be offended on that account," exclaimed Eleanor. "But, how did it happen?"

"I waited upon Mrs. Fitzherbert an hour ago to exhibit those beautiful caps," continued Mrs. Brace indicating the objects of her remark, and which she had carefully deposited upon the bed: "when I opened the band-box, she caught a glimpse of the velvet dress and insisted upon seeing it. I dared not refuse compliance with her demand—and she was enchanted. Indeed, to tell your ladyship the truth, I am to make her one according to the same fashion without delay. But, by the bye," added the milliner, with a frankness and

candour so well assumed that the Countess was completely duped by the apparent artlessness of her manner;—"I should have observed that his Royal Highness was seated at breakfast with Mrs. Fitzherbert at the time—and that—But, no—I dare not say any more."

And Mrs. Brace pretended to be suddenly animated by a second thought which threw her into confusion.

"Oh! I cannot allow you to break off thus in the middle of your narrative," exclaimed Eleanor, whose curiosity was excited, she scarcely knew why—unless, indeed, it were by a presentiment that the Prince had mentioned her name in complimentary terms!

"If your ladyship's commands be that I should tell you everything which really occurred this morning at Carlton House," said Mrs. Brace, "I cannot of course prove disobedient."

"Yes—let me hear it all," returned Eleanor, half-ashamed at thus indulging in what she could only look upon as the most frivolous gossip; and yet her heart palpitated all the while.

"Well, I will be explicit," continued Mrs. Brace, who was thus deliberately and coolly inventing a scene at Carlton House which had not taken place at all; for she had come direct from her own abode to Berkeley Square, and had not set eyes on Mrs. Fitzherbert for some weeks past. "The moment I produced your splendid velvet dress, Mrs. Fitzherbert was in raptures—and she insisted upon knowing whom it was for, I accordingly mentioned your ladyship's name; upon hearing which, his Royal Highness burst forth into such enthusiastic praises of your ladyship's beauty—figure—elegant gait—and fascinating manners that—But I am really trembling from head to foot lest I should offend your ladyship?" exclaimed the artful milliner, appearing to be suddenly seized with renewed confusion and embarrassment.

"Nay—I am not so easily chagrined or hurt," exclaimed Eleanor, affecting to experience no other sentiment than that of amusement at this tittle tattle—whereas her bosom was in reality heaving with indescribable emotions. "Proceed, Mrs. Brace: you divert me much, I can assure you."

"I thank your ladyship for relieving me of the apprehension that I might give offence," resumed the wily milli-

ner, who failed not to observe that the Countess was rapidly becoming more deeply interested in her narrative. "I was informing your ladyship that the Prince broke out into enthusiastic, nay, I may almost add, rapturous eulogies on your ladyship's style of loveliness;—and he was continuing in this strain—evidently carried away by the impulse of his feelings—when Mrs. Fitzherbert interrupted him sharply. For, I do not mind telling your ladyship,—since we have entered upon the subject,—that his Royal Highness did say enough—and far more than enough to provoke Mrs. Fitzherbert's jealousy. In fact, as I have already had the honour of informing your ladyship, nothing could equal his enthusiasm."

"And what did Mrs. Fitzherbert say?" inquired Eleanor, her cheeks glowing as she recalled to mind the impassioned kisses that the heir-apparent had imprinted on her lips when he held her in his arms on that memorable afternoon the particulars of which had never escaped her memory.

"Mrs. Fitzherbert exclaimed, '*Everybody knows that Lady Desborough is one of the handsomest women in England: but you need not dwell upon her charms, for all that!*'—To which the Prince replied, '*There is no harm in admiring a beautiful creature like the Countess: indeed, a man must possess a heart of stone who cannot worship female loveliness wherever it exists.*'—These were the principal observations that passed," added the designing Mrs. Brace; "and now your ladyship has compelled me to reveal everything."

"And are you sure that there is no exaggeration in your narrative?" exclaimed Eleanor, affecting to laugh, while in reality she was deeply moved—and had the Prince been with her at that moment, and none else present, his Royal Highness would not perhaps have been repulsed as on the former occasion.

"I can assure your ladyship that I have not coloured my tale in the least," said Mrs. Brace. "By the bye, I am to return again to Carlton House in the afternoon, with the patterns of the velvet for Mrs. Fitzherbert's dress."

"Well—but what induced you to tell me that you were to return thither?" inquired the Countess of Desborough.

"Oh! nothing my lady!" ejaculated the milliner. "Only I was thinking how annoyed Mrs. Fitzherbert would be, if—just for the sake of a little mischief—I were to tell his Royal

Highness in her presence that I had communicated to your ladyship all the particulars which occurred ere now at Carlton House."

"You cannot dream of such a thing!" ejaculated Eleanor, her pride suddenly prevailing over the tender and voluptuous thoughts which had been excited in her bosom. "Not for worlds would I have you be guilty of such an imprudence! Indeed, I perceive that I was wrong to indulge in this idle gossip, Mrs. Brace," she added haughtily.

"Pray forgive me for the indiscretion which I have perpetrated!" cried the milliner, appearing to be quite grieved at this sudden change in the manner of her patroness: and, in fact, she saw that she had gone a little too far. "No my lady—I am incapable of such conduct I can assure you. At the same time, it must be as galling to Mrs. Fitzherbert to know that the Prince is desperately in love with your ladyship, as it is complimentary to you."

"You do not mean to imply that the few flattering phrases which his Royal Highness condescended to utter concerning me denote anything of so serious a nature on his part?" said Eleanor, with a softened tone and manner.

"If I were to explain my real sentiments to your ladyship, you would only upbraid me again," observed the milliner, affecting to be busied in putting on her bonnet and scarf preparatory to taking her departure.

"No—I promise to be less hasty with you, my good Mrs. Brace," said the Countess. "Speak frankly and candidly: for although it be but idle gossip—the mere pastime of chit-chat——"

"Precisely so, my lady," said the milliner. "You have given me permission to explain my real sentiments? Well—I will tell you honestly and sincerely, then, how I read the feeling of his Royal Highness. He loves—he adores—he worships you!"

"Mrs. Brace, this language which I dare not listen to!" exclaimed Eleanor, the crimson tide flooding her cheeks—her neck—her very bosom.

"Did I not say that your ladyship would only scold me?" cried the milliner, affecting to be plunged into the most painful bewilderment. "What am I to do? Your ladyship condescends to listen to me—commands me to speak frankly—and then covers me with your displeasure."

"I was wrong, my good creature," said the Countess of Desborough: "for I admit that I gave you encouragement to make this extraordinary and most unexpected revelation. But how can you possibly be so foolish as to construe into a serious sentiment the few idle compliments which the Prince was pleased to utter concerning me?"

"Ah! my lady," returned Mrs. Brace, "if you had studied human nature as profoundly as I have done, your ladyship would not be so sceptical. There is a wide and essential difference between mere passing flattery and those enthusiastic praises which come from the heart. Think you, my lady, that the Prince, in a moment of perfect good temper, would wantonly provoke a quarrel with Mrs. Fitzherbert by exciting her jealousy? Assuredly not. The truth is, that he was carried away by his feelings—he was borne along by the tide of rapturous emotions—and the words he uttered flowed irresistibly from his heart. Had his life depended on the issue, he could not have stayed that passionate ebullition of glowing praises. The spell of your ladyship's beauty gave an impulse to his language, which rendered him magnificently eloquent: and, Oh! how handsome and god-like did he appear when thus breathing forth the evidence of a love—an ardent love—the existence of which he could not conceal even though in the presence of Mrs. Fitzherbert! His soul, speaking through his eyes as intelligibly as by his tongue, was one flame of passion. His cheeks mantled and his heart throbbed, as if the incantation of your witching beauty was upon him. Oh! I could read all that was passing in his mind—in his heart—in the profundities of his soul:—and I pitied him!"

"You pitied him?" said Eleanor, in a languid and tremulous tone, as a thousand agitating thoughts and tender feelings swept through her.

"Pardon me for making the observation, my lady," returned the milliner, throwing some emotion into her own voice; "but I must frankly confess that I *did* pity him then—*do* pity him now!"

"Then he loves me!" murmured Eleanor, leaning her head upon her hand and falling into a deep reverie, which lasted several minutes: at length, raising her eyes, and starting at beholding Mrs. Brace whose presence she had forgotten during that

interval of profound meditation, she said, "You must think me very vain—very silly—very foolish to have listened with so much apparent attention to all you have been telling me: but it has served to while away an hour," she added, glancing at the time-piece upon the mantel;—and I thank you for your kind endeavours to amuse me."

"I hope your ladyship does not imagine that I have uttered a single word which is not literally true, or in which I do not conscientiously believe," said Mrs. Brace.

"No—I give you credit for sincerity," responded Eleanor: then, her pride again coming to her aid, she observed in a tone which denoted her desire that the conversation should end, "You may leave two of the morning-caps—those which you think will become me best."

Mrs. Brace was too discreet not to take the hint thus conveyed: she accordingly made her curtsy and withdrew.

But as the crafty and designing milliner descended the stairs, she chuckled inwardly at the effect which she saw had been produced by her specious language on the mind of the Countess of Desborough; and she said to herself, "That proud patrician lady will ere long surrender the fortalice of her charms to the Prince!"

On entering the waiting-room adjoining the hall, the milliner found the young lady in deep mourning whom she had left there, conversing with a tall, thin, pale, but very handsome and interesting young man, dressed in a neat though homely garb.

"Now Miss Morton, my dear," said Mrs. Brace: "we will return home."

"I am at your service, madam," answered the beautiful girl; and, with a gentle inclination of the head towards the young man, she followed her mistress from the room.

When they were in the hackney-coach together, the milliner said, "Who was that person you were talking to, Camilla?"

"He is a stranger to me, madam," was the prompt and ingenuous reply. "Indeed, he had not been in the apartment many minutes ere you came. Some civil remark which he made rendered it necessary for me to give him an equally courteous answer: but if you are offended with me, madam, for speaking to one totally unknown to me, I can assure you that I gave

him no encouragement to address me."

"My dear Camilla," said Mrs. Brace, in her kindest tone, "I am not in the least vexed with you. I know that you are a good girl and will follow my advice in all things; and that is sufficient. Indeed, I have promised to become a mother to you—and I will keep my word."

"Oh! my dear madam, how grateful am I to you for this assurance!" exclaimed the young girl who was as beautiful as the sweet Christian name to which she answered and who now appeared deeply—deeply interesting as her eyes flashed looks of gratitude through her tears, as if they were lighted up with twin drops of the diamond dew.

"Come, my dear child," said Mrs. Brace; "wipe away all traces of weeping—for you have a little commission to execute for me at this house where the coach is about to stop."

And as the milliner uttered these words, the vehicle, in pursuance of the directions which she had already given to the driver, drew up at the front door of a splendid mansion in Piccadilly.

"I am anxious that this note," said Mrs. Brace, handing Camilla a neatly folded billet, "should be delivered to Lord Florimel—and to him only. It must not be conveyed through a servant—and I do not wish to deliver it myself. The truth is, my love," added the milliner, in a hasty and confidential whisper, "it is a little money-matter—a debt which one of his lordship's lady-cousins owes me—and I know that all my previous application for payment have been intercepted, when addressed to him. He will settle his extravagant relative's liability, if we can manage that the note shall only reach him."

"I understand you, madam," said the artless, innocent, and unsuspecting Camilla, perfectly satisfied with this explanation, every word of which was of course false; "you desire me to solicit an interview with his lordship, and place the note in his hands."

"That is exactly what I mean, my love," responded Mrs. Brace, with bland tone and caressing manner.

The beautiful girl, anxious to testify her readiness to oblige a mistress who promised to be a mother to her, descended from the vehicle; and the front door of the mansion being by this time open in obedience to the summons

given by the coachman; she inquired of the powdered and lace-bedizened lacquey whether Lord Florimel was at home. An answer was returned in the affirmative; and she was conducted into a small but elegantly-furnished parlour, where the young nobleman, in a morning garb was lounging in an arm-chair close by the blazing fire, perusing a novel.

The instant that Camilla made her appearance, he was struck by the beauty of her person, the modesty of her demeanour, and the sylph-like symmetry of her form. Advancing bashfully—almost timidly—towards him, she presented the note observing in a soft and silver tone “Mrs. Brace sends this, my lord; with her respectful compliments.”

Florimel instantly comprehended, by the fact of the fair creature being in mourning, that she was the same young person of whom Mrs. Brace had spoken to him on that morning when she received him in her bed chamber, and when he so nearly surrendered to the attractions of her matured and voluptuous charms. Casting upon Miss Morton another look of deep and tender interest, Florimel opened the note, which contained only these words:—

“What think you, my dear friend, of the bearer of this? You are a naughty man for not coming to see me. Pray explain this absence of several days—not by letter, but in person. I shall expect you to sup with me on any evening you may choose to appoint; and if it be agreeable to you, I can promise that the bearer, Miss Camilla Morton, shall be of the party. All you need now say to her is that you will attend to the note.”

For a moment a cloud passed over Lord Florimel’s countenance, as the thought swept across his imagination that Mrs. Brace was determined to throw temptation in his way and seduce him from the allegiance and fidelity which he had sworn to the lovely Pauline: but when he again fixed his eyes upon the charming girl who stood bashfully waiting his answer to the billet, he had not the moral courage to deliver an unfavourable response. He accordingly said, “Tell your mistress, that I will give my early attention to her letter.”

Camilla thanked his lordship and retired, followed by the looks of the young and noble voluptuary, who was enraptured by the elegance of the retreating figure which his eyes thus

devoured, and ravished by the glimpse which he caught of a foot and ankle of the most enchanting shape.

But just at the moment when Miss Morton was descending the steps of the front door, two young ladies—beautifully dressed, extremely handsome, and evidently sisters—who happened to be passing, stopped short and one of them, exclaiming to the other, “That is Gabriel’s house!” fixed a searching look upon Camilla.

The young girl, though utterly unconscious of having done anything wrong, nevertheless blushed up to the very forehead on finding herself the object of this unaccountable scrutiny; and the lady from whose lips the ejaculation had burst and who was thus intently regarding her, said in a somewhat imperious tone, “I presume, Miss, that you have been to see Lord Florimel?”

Camilla was so confused that she could make no reply; and the blush upon her cheeks deepened into the liveliest crimson.

“Oh! I comprehend it all!” exclaimed the young lady, drawing herself up with a superb dignity, while the glow of wounded pride flushed her magnificent countenance: then turning to her sister, she said, “Come, Octavia—let us continue our walk.”

And as the two ladies passed on together, Camilla hurried into the vehicle, whence Mrs. Brace had observed all that had just occurred.

The hackney-coach proceeded towards Pall Mall; and the milliner, after receiving the message which Lord Florimel had sent her, and at which she was secretly delighted, said, “Those two ladies behaved very rudely to you, my love: but it was evidently some misapprehension on their part.”

“I am afraid that I did wrong in venturing alone into the presence of that nobleman,” observed Miss Morton, the tears streaming down her cheeks, as she smarted under the indignity which she had experienced at the hands of the two ladies. “What could they mean?—why did they regard me so intently?—what did they take me for?”

“Tranquillise yourself, my dear child,” said Mrs. Brace, never at a loss for expedients to explain away a difficulty, and by no means desirous that Camilla should be shocked by the late proceeding, whence unpleasant suspicions might be engendered in the mind of the artless girl: “I can satisfy

you on every point. Those two young ladies were his lordship's cousins—and the younger, who insulted you, is the one owing me the money. Catching a glimpse of my face in the coach, she suspected your errand; and that was the reason of her insolent conduct.

Camilla was immediately relieved by this explanation, composed of a tissue of falsehoods though it were: for the milliner had perfectly well recognised the daughters of Mr. Clarendon, and had taken very good care that Octavia should not see *her*.

The hackney-coach drove rapidly on towards Pall Mall, Mrs. Brace having no more visits to make nor commissions for Miss Morton to execute on the present occasion.

CHAPTER LX.

THE SURGEON.

OUR readers will not have forgotten a certain Mr. Thurston, who figured in the opening chapters of our narrative. This medical gentleman, having not only accumulated money by unwearied application to his business and by habits of the strictest parsimony, but having also received the munificent sum of ten thousand pounds as a recompense for taking charge of the Princess Sophia's child removed from the Edgeware Road into the fashionable district of May Fair.

The house which he thus took was large and of handsome appearance: it stood at the corner of a long paved alley forming the entrance to a mews, and whence a door communicated with the yard at the back of his premises. The interior of the dwelling he furnished in a costly style, well knowing how much the world is in the habit of judging a medical man's talents by his pecuniary prosperity and the style in which he lives. In this instance, therefore, neither Mr. Thurston nor his niggard wife spared their gold in embellishing their new abode: for it was a matter of calculation that the more they thus laid out, the greater would become the professional practice and the larger the returns of revenue.

The infant, who had been entrusted to the care of these people, and whom they had adopted as their own son under the name of Godfrey Thurston, thrived admirably. The greatest attention was bestowed upon the child,—and

the surgeon's wife soon learnt to love it; while her husband, who was a shrewd and far-seeing man often thought within himself that the existence of this proof of some high-born lady's frailty would some day or another yield him a richer harvest than even the ten thousand pounds which he had already reaped.

It was only on the very morning of those incidents which we have detailed in the preceding chapter, that the brass plate with Mr. Thurston's name and profession engraved thereon, had been duly fixed upon the front-door of the new house in May Fair.

In the afternoon, a tall handsome-looking gentleman, enveloped in a cloak lined with sables, was walking, not exactly in a leisurely, but rather in an abstracted and mournful mood, along the secret,—when he suddenly caught sight of the brass-plate. The neighbourhood was so familiar to him, that he was instantly aware of this being a new professional arrival in the district: besides, the exterior of the house had just been repaired and improved, and he also remembered that it was for some time to let until within a week or two past; so that all doubt removed from his mind as to Mr. Thurston being a very recent settler in that fashionable colony.

Struck by some idea, which rapidly gained an influence upon him, he fixed his eyes for a few moments on the brass-plate—then walked on a few paces—then looked back again at the surgeon's abode—and then pursued his way, but with every evidence of indecision and hesitation in his manner. He was wrestling with the thought that had flashed to his mind, and which prompted him on the one hand to adopt a course, whence shame and a deep sense of humiliation deterred him on the other.

At length, before he had gained the end of the street, he turned with the decision of a man who has abruptly resolved on taking a particular step, although a disagreeable one;—and, retracing his path to the surgeon's house, he knocked at the door.

A domestic in a handsome livery immediately answered the summons, and inquired the visitor's name so that he might learn whether he were a friend of the family or a patient, and might show him into the drawing-room or the surgery parlour accordingly.

"I wish to consult your master pro-

fessionally," was the reply, but unaccompanied with the announcement of any name.

The domestic led the way through a fine marble hall, to a carpetted passage communicating with the surgery-parlour, which joined the surgery itself, both being at the back part of the house. The parlour was a small but elegantly furnished room, having double doors alike at the entrance from the passage and also on the side opening into the surgery—so that nothing which transpired within those four walls could be heard without. A cheerful fire blazed in the grate; and Mr. Thurston rose from a table where he had been engaged in writing when the visitor was conducted into his presence.

"Your name, sir!" said Mr. Thurston, preparing to inscribe in a new book the appellation of his first patient at the new abode.

"It were a ridiculous affectation to conceal it," was the answer; "because I live at no very great distance, and because my rank would be certain to render you acquainted with my person in a short time. Nevertheless, it is in the strictest confidence, and relying on your honour, that I have come to consult you upon an important—an afflicting—a most delicate matter. I am the Earl of Desborough."

Mr. Thurston wrote down the name in his book and then said, "Your lordship may trust me. I have no interest in betraying the confidence thus reposed in me—but every possible reason to sustain it. Your lordship may likewise speak fearlessly: not a word uttered in this room can be heard without."

"I perceive that you have only recently settled in this neighbourhood," observed the nobleman; "and the recommendations of an influential friend may not prove a mean auxiliary to your own professional abilities. Those recommendations shall you have from me—that friend will I become."

"I most sincerely thank your lordship," said Mr. Thurston: "but even without these kind—these generous promises, I should not the less be faithful to any confidence which you may repose in me."

"Lady Desborough and myself have our regular family physician," continued the Earl: "but it happens that our surgeon has lately quitted the metropolis. Under these circumstances, therefore, you shall henceforth

supply his place. Do not however think, Mr. Thurston," he added emphatically, "that I am saying all this merely with a view to bind you to my interests or appeal to vulgar mercenary feeling. Such is not my intention: I am incapable of thus insulting you. But I wish you to understand that I have resolved to consult you in a certain matter—to entrust you with my sad secret—and to place the utmost reliance upon you, because we have hitherto been total strangers to each other—because you come into a new neighbourhood where some trifling amount of patronage may be useful—and because—"

"Because you believe that under any circumstances, I am more likely to keep your lordship's secret than an established practitioner who wastes half his time in idle chit-chat with those families at whose houses he is on intimate footing. This is your lordship's view," added Mr. Thurston, in a decisive tone, "and it is a correct one. I am not offended—I thank your lordship for that promise of patronage which I cordially accept—and every way will I prove myself worthy of your lordship's favour and countenance."

"I am glad that you have put the matter thus frankly upon its proper basis," said the Earl: then drawing forth from his purse a bank-note for five hundred pounds, he added, "This is your retaining fee."

Mr. Thurston bowed his thanks, and placed himself in an attitude of deep attention.

"I must inform you, sir," resumed the Earl, his manner suddenly becoming painfully embarrassed, "that I approach with the deepest humiliation—with the acutest sense of shame—the subject of my visit. Married for some years to a lady of extraordinary beauty and of the strictest virtue, but whose temperament is naturally of an ardent, glowing, and impassionate nature—I—but just heaven! how can I induce my tongue to frame the confession—"

And, suddenly starting from the seat which he had taken on entering the room, the Earl began to pace to and fro in the wildest agitation.

Mr. Thurston said nothing: he was not intimate enough with the nobleman to venture upon words of consolation, although he more than half suspected the nature of the secret which was about to be revealed to him.

Suddenly checking his frantic walk

up and down the surgery-parlour, the Earl laid his right hand heavily upon the surgeon's shoulder—and bending his head until his lips nearly touched Thurston's ears, he said in a thick, hoarse, and low voice, "Five thousand pounds are yours if you can give me any hope: for I—wretch that I am—Oh! do not look up at me as I speak—I am——"

And the remaining word which proclaimed the fatal secret and confirmed the medical man's previous suspicion, was conveyed in the lowest audible whisper.

"Now you are acquainted with my misery—and my heart is already easier," said the nobleman, flinging himself once more on the seat which he had ere now quitted.

"Then there is no hope, Mr. Thurston?" said the Earl, after a long private conference: and he spoke in a voice which betrayed how deeply he was moved.

"None, my lord," was the emphatic answer. "It would be downright robbery to take a shilling from you for such a purpose. Besides, your lordship has already remunerated me far too handsomely."

"Say not a word upon that subject," returned the nobleman. "My secret——"

"Is the same as if it had never been confided to me," rejoined Mr. Thurston.

"I thank you—sincerely thank you," said the Earl;—and pressing the surgeon's hand with convulsive violence, the unfortunate nobleman took his departure.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening, and Mr. Thurston was alone in the surgery, having purposely dismissed his assistant, although there were several medicines to compound and send out—for the first day of the professional gentleman's career at the West End, had been a busy and a lucrative one.

The surgery had three doors: one communicated with the parlour where he had received the Earl of Desborough, and which was intended for the reception of persons calling to consult him: the second opened into the yard at the back of the building;—and the third communicated with an apartment of which we shall have

to speak more in a future chapter. But these details, trivial as they may now appear, must be borne in mind.

Presently a bell in the surgery rang. Mr. Thurston opened the door leading into the yard—and, passing out, he unfastened the gate communicating with the stables before alluded to.

A man immediately entered the premises, and Thurston conducted him, without saying a word, into the surgery, closing the door carefully behind him.

The individual whom he had thus admitted into his *sanctum*, was a short, strong-built, ill-looking fellow, with a repulsive countenance, and a sinister leer in the small reptile-like eyes which did one harm to meet their gaze. He was clothed in a coarse, rough, and negligent manner—but not through poverty: for the villain's ill-gotten gains were sufficient in the course of a month to keep an entire family in a respectable style for a whole year.

This man was Miles the Buzgloak.

"Well, sir," he said, as soon as the surgeon had closed the door, "you see I'm punctual to the appointment which you was kind enow to give me. So you've got into your new house—eh? Well, I only hope your business will increase accordingly—and then I shall have all the more of your patronage."

"I did not send for you here to bestow your conversation upon me," exclaimed Mr. Thurston, sharply. "You are well aware what I require, can you manage it for me soon and secretly?"

"As for secrecy," responded Miles, "your honour knows that it's the very first principle of our business: and as for doing it soon, I can promise the thing for next Monday night, and no mistake whatsoever."

"Ah!—next Monday night!" ejaculated the surgeon, a thought striking him. "Yes—I remember—it was said in this morning's paper that next Monday is the day fixed—But you mean me to have one of *them*, eh?"

"You can't have a better, sir," responded the man. "The young lun will suit your book to a nicety."

"Well—be it so. And if any obstacle should arise in that quarter——"

"Then I must get you another—that's all!" answered the Buzgloak. "But it ain't likely: so if you'll be prepared next Monday night to receive me and my partner Dick the Trampen,

who's as fine a fellow as any under the sun—specially at this here sort of work—”

“I have no doubt of his merits whatsoever,” interrupted Mr. Thurston, laconically. “At midnight—as near that hour as possible—I shall expect you. At all events, I shall remain in the surgery until you ring the bell of the gate opening from the news. If you do not come by two in the morning, I shall conclude it is a failure in that quarter—”

“Make your mind easy, sir,” exclaimed the Buzgloak, with a significant leer. “At twelve o'clock, or thereabouts, you'll hear the bell a-tinkling, sure enow. And having got so far, we'll just settle about the price—and then I'll take my walyable carcass off—'cos I've got another appointment on some business for this evening.”

“Name your own terms—and I can easily say whether I agree to them, or not,” observed the medical gentleman.

“Well—forty shiners won't hurt you,” said Miles, fixing his serpent eyes upon Thurston to see how the price named was relished.

“No—'tis ten too much,” was the answer.

“Come—we'll split the difference, and have no more bother about,” exclaimed the Buzgloak. “Thirty-five—cash on delivery—them's the terms; and on any others Mr. Miles respectfully declines doing business, as the ready-money tradesmen puts on their circulars.”

“Be it so,” said the surgeon. “At twelve, then next Monday night, I shall expect you.”

“There or thereabouts,” responded the Buzgloak. “I know you'll be well satisfied with the result; and the bargain is entirely your'n. It's as cheap as dirt, considering the risk's transportation for life. But poor men like me must live any how—”

“And I don't suppose you are very particular in what way it is,” interrupted the medical man, suffering his countenance relax into a smile. “But we have settled everything—and—”

“And I'll bundle,” added Miles.

The man accordingly took his departure, Mr. Thurston conducting him out by the back door.

On leaving the abode of the medical gentleman, Miles the Buzgloak proceeded rapidly towards Westminster; and passing round the Abbey cemetery, he struck into the maze of vile and crowded streets lying in the im-

mediate vicinity of that venerable pile. In spite of the frosty chill of weather, half-naked women were seen standing at the open doors of the wretched houses—the light from the windows flickering dimly upon their persons, and revealing countenances either bloated or emaciated with dissipation: while their language, as they discoursed across the thoroughfares with each other, bore terrible and unequivocal evidence to their utter depravity and boundless profligacy.

From many of the dwellings came the noise of uproarious revelry and the boisterous sounds of drunken orgies,—mingled with the shrieks of some unfortunate female whom a paramour was treating with ruffian brutality, and the shrill voice of some querulous wife responding in bitter taunts to the coarse and gruff upbraidings of a worthless husband. Around the doors of the low public-houses were congregated loathsome wretches in female shape, chattering or disputing in loud tones—insulting any respectable person who might chance to pass that way—and making the whole neighbourhood ring with their vociferations of delight, when some flash fellow or fancy man accosted them with an offer to stand treat for gin. Now and then a poor mechanic out of work, and whom dire penury had forced to take up his abode in that horrible district, would creep shivering and miserable along the street to the house in which he occupied a wretched attic, and where he knew that a wife was giving a withered breast to a poor frail infant, and where starving children were crying piteously for the bread which he had not succeeded in obtaining throughout a long day's anxious and heart-breaking quest for honest employment. Now and then, too, some scantily clad and emaciated woman would drag herself along through that morass of human reptiles, back to the cold and naked lodging where she had left a loved husband lying sick on a bundle of rags or a heap of straw, and famished little ones huddling together to keep themselves warm, while the poor father endeavoured to cheer his wretched offspring with the hope that their mother would be sure to bring them bread—a hope which in a few minutes was to experience so dire a disappointment!

For, oh! honest poverty and unblushing vice are always to be found in the same districts always inhabit

the same neighbourhoods: because a bad reputation cheapens lodgings in those quarters, and the upright poor are driven by an imperious and stern necessity to seek the advantages which inveterate demoralization has thus procured. And it is in this manner that the honest poverty ends by being drawn into the vortex of corruption and absorbed in the mass of profligacy and crime: it is thus that the poor artizan is led to steal sooner than behold his children starve;—it is thus that his wife is drawn into the loathsome circle whose centre is the gin-shop, where she imbibes the fire-water that drowns her cares and her better feelings at one and the same time;—it is thus, too, that the fair young daughter of these lost parents goes forth into the street to stretch out her hand to implore arms, as if she were holding it out to God,—when it is caught by some licentious rake or hoary voluptuary, who drops gold into the palm that only hoped to feel the touch of pence—and then another virtuous soul is lost, and another member added to the eighty thousand daughters of crime who crowd the finest thoroughfares and the most wretched alleys in the richest city of the universe!

But all this time, away rolls the portly Bishop in his splendid equipage, dreaming of his thirty thousand a year and the fat livings which he has in his gift;—away flies the superb carriage containing the peer whose enormous income is made up of the flesh and blood of hundreds of starving labourers upon his vast estates;—away goes the chariot, in which patrician beauty lolls so languishingly, not thinking that the poor girl who made the satin dress that she wears, was with the same needle and thread sewing her own winding sheet;—away passes the sumptuous barouche, bearing to some banquet the wealthy manufacturer who has just been voting in the House of Commons some measure calculated to rivet the iron oppression which already goads his slaves to desperation; away glides the brilliant equipage, on the downy cushion of which slumbers in a dreamy listlessness the coal-mine owner of countless riches, all produced by a sweat as agonising as that which streamed from the Saviour's pores on the Mount of Olives!—away flies the state coach of Royalty to the Opera which fills the pockets of foreigners with gold, while the votaries

of the national drama are pining in debtors' prisons or preparing to visit the Bankruptcy Court on the morrow;—away, away, they all go—those magnificent equipages, with their splendid steeds, and their glancing lamps, and their pampered menials,—away, away, spurning that ground to which the poor are crushed, and throwing up clouds of that dust which the famished slaves of toil are compelled to lick!

But to return to our tale.

Miles the Buzgloak pursued his path amidst the pestilential streets which lie behind the Abbey; and at length he entered a low public-house, or flash ken, known by the sign of the Jolly Prize-fighters. Nothing familiarly to the landlord as he passed the bar, he entered the tap-room, in which there was only one person seated at the moment he crossed the threshold.

That person was Dick the Trampler,—a tall, athletic, stoutly built man, with a shock of fiery red hair, a large round face to match, and bushy whiskers of the same hue.

"Well, Miles—is it all right?" demanded this individual, as his friend threw himself on the same bench near the fire.

"All right," responded the Buzgloak. "The saw-bones Thurston will give thirty-five shiners—and I closed with him."

"That's just what we said we should get by asking forty," observed the Trampler. "Well, I han't been idle either," he continued, in the husky voice that was habitual with him. "I've taken a complete survey, of the premises I spoke to you about; and it's easy enow to get in by the area; for it's the only house in the square that hasn't got bars at the kitchen winder."

"So far, so good," said Miles. "But what about Joe Warren?"

"Oh! he'll jine in with us," answered Dick the Trampler. "He says he's quite sick of laying hid down yonder; and he'll make one in the affair, if it's on'y to keep his-self in practice. He'll meet us at a certain part of the square which we've agreed upon at half-past twelve precise."

"That's good again!" cried the Buzgloak. "I'm glad the Magsman's in it: nothink never fails that he undertakes. But where's the tools?"

"Jemmy—centre-bit—wrench—skeleton-keys—and pistols, all stowed away safe," responded the Trampler,

clapping his hands upon the capacious pockets of his rough coat.

"All right," said Miles, with an approving nod of the head. "Well, we'll start ten minutes after midnight, eh?—and in the meantime we've got half-an-hour to smoke a clay and drink a pot or so."

"With all my heart," returned the Trampler.

And the two villains set to work to enjoy themselves accordingly.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE ROYAL GUEST.

WE must now return to the Earl of Desborough, whom we left at the moment when he quitted Mr. Thurston's house in May Fair.

Summoning all his fortitude to his aid, after the crushing assurance which he had received to the effect that his last and only hope was fruitless, the nobleman returned home—shut himself up in his private apartment—and gave way to a long and painful meditation.

We cannot possibly endeavour to penetrate his thoughts: but that they were of the most harrowing description, might be inferred from his occasional outbursts of passionate grief—the superhuman efforts he made to subdue the fearful excitement which thus maddened him at intervals—the anguish with which he from time to time dashed his hands against his high and noble forehead—the despair to which he abandoned himself—and the frequency with which he exclaimed aloud, "Yes—either suicide or that *other* dread alternative! My God! my God! have compassion on me!"

Once he seated himself at his desk and commenced a long letter which he addressed to his wife, and in which he explained the motives that led him to resolve upon self-destruction. While thus engaged, he experienced unnatural calmness—amounting almost to that joy which animates the desperate man who has resolved upon escaping from the miseries of life by the avenue of suicide;—and a smile of satisfaction stole over his countenance, as he folded, sealed, and directed the letter. Then he rose from his seat—took his pistols from the case—charged and primed them.

Yes—he had resolved upon self-destruction!

But even at the very instant when he was about to place the muzzle of one of the fatal weapons in his mouth, the idea flashed to his mind that he would dishonour his name, and by reflection dishonour his wife also, were he to accomplish his terrible purpose: for no one would believe that insanity had driven him to the consummation of such a deed. And that first idea engendered a thousand others, which swept through his brain in ghastly and appalling array,—the Coroner's inquest—the probability that the Countess might in the first moment of her terror, exhibit his letter to some friend or faint on reading it, and thus afford others an opportunity of reading it also—the chance that Thurston might come forward, as a matter of public duty, to bear evidence respecting the real facts which had prompted the suicidal deed—then the verdict of *felo de se*—the denial of Christian prayers—the disgrace which would survive him, and which would in a measure cling to his widow, especially if the fatal cause of his suicide should transpire,—all these reflections passed through his mind with the rapidity of a hurricane.

Shuddering at the idea of self-destruction which he had dared to harbour, and which for a short space he had contemplated so calmly,—shocked to the very soul at the madness to which he had yielded,—the wretched Earl restored his pistols to their case, and threw into the fire the letter which he had addressed to his wife.

Then, somewhat relieved, he again paced the room;—and at last he ejaculated in accents of despair, "Yes—it must be that *other* alternative! There is no help for it—My God! my God!"

Having thus made up his mind to the adoption of a certain plan which, though cruelly revolting and abhorrent to his mind, was, notwithstanding, far less terrible than the idea of suicide, the Earl of Desborough composed his countenance—arranged his dress—ordered his carriage—and repaired direct to Carlton House.

It was about three in the afternoon when the nobleman reached the princely dwelling: and he was immediately ushered into the presence of his Royal Highness, who happened to be alone and disengaged at the time.

At first the heir-apparent was some-

what confused when the Earl's name was announced: for he knew that Mrs. Brace was to have seen the Countess in the morning,—and it instantly struck him that she might have managed her business so clumsily as to compromise himself—and that her ladyship had complained to her husband, who was now come to demand explanations of the indignity offered to his wife. But the affable tone and the manner of dignified respect with which Lord Desborough accosted the Prince, speedily dissipated those apprehensions, and his Royal Highness received the noble visitor with a cordiality enhanced by the relief that his feelings had just experienced.

After the usual compliments had been exchanged and a few observations passed on the leading topics of the day, the Earl of Desborough, drawing his chair closer to that on which the heir-apparent was lounging, said in a subdued and serious tone, "I am about to take an exceeding liberty with your Royal Highness: but I humbly hope that my motives will be rightly understood. Have I permission to explain myself farther?"

"Most assuredly, my esteemed friend," exclaimed the Prince, wondering to what point this mysterious preface was to lead, but confident that it had no connexion with the designs which he had formed and the intrigues he had set on foot in regard to the manner which—
 "You cannot, I am well aware, have anything in view which is inconsistent with my interests; for your lordship invariably votes on the right side," added the Prince of Wales who, be it recollected, patronised the Whig party, to which the Earl belonged.

"I thank your Royal Highness for this gracious permission to explain myself," said the nobleman; "and I shall proceed frankly and candidly to state the object of my visit. The indelicate publicity which the Pitt Cabinet has given to the pecuniary affairs of your Royal Highness, has both grieved and incensed me. It nevertheless ceases to be a mere rumour or surmise that your Royal Highness, is somewhat annoyed by certain liabilities at the present moment; and as some weeks must elapse ere the House of Commons can possibly come to a vote upon the propositions submitted to it the other day in respect to those embarrassments, I have ventured to seek this interview

with your Royal Highness for the purpose of stating that I have at the moment a surplus of twenty thousand pounds in my bankers' hands. If your Royal Highness will condescend to take charge of that amount till the end of the year——"

"My dear friend," interrupted the Prince, his countenance lighting up with joy, as he seized the Earl's hand and wrung them both with cordial warmth,—
 "I appreciate all the generosity and delicacy of this proceeding on your part; and I accept with unfeigned gratitude the noble offer which you have made me."

"In that case," said the Earl, "if your Royal Highness would condescend to accept such poor hospitality as I may be enabled this evening to offer——"

"Again I express my thanks," interrupted the Prince, delighted at the prospect of a twofold pleasure: namely, of touching twenty thousand pounds on the one hand, and of passing a few hours in company with the charming Eleanor on the other. "If it be agreeable to your lordship and your amiable Countess, I will take dinner with you this evening. But pray let us enjoy a friendly privacy——"

"It is precisely this that I intended to propose," said the Earl. "Her ladyship will feel honoured by the presence of your Royal Highness," he added, his voice becoming slightly tremulous and the colour deepening somewhat on his cheeks: but recovering his composure so speedily that his transient emotion was not observed by the Prince; he added, "At eight o'clock we shall expect your Royal Highness."

"I shall be punctual," responded the heir-apparent;—and the Earl took his leave, in order to visit his bankers.

It was about half-past four in the afternoon when the nobleman returned to his mansion in Berkeley Square: and having ascertained that the Countess was alone in the drawing-room which she usually occupied in the winter season, he proceeded straight to that apartment.

"My dearest Eleanor," he said, rendering his voice as kind and his manner as cordial as he possibly could; "I had occasion to call just now upon his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales——"

Lady Desborough started; and it was only by a strong effort that she suppressed the ejaculation which rose to her lips.

"And his Royal Highness," continued the Earl, who at the instant let his handkerchief fall and stooped to pick it up—so that Eleanor was relieved by the certainty that emotion had escaped his observation,—“and his Royal Highness will condescend to dine with us this evening. He has a little business to transact with me, of a pecuniary nature; and therefore his visit is strictly private—and he wishes to be alone with us, quite in a friendly way. The business to which I have alluded, will not occupy many minutes and can be transacted when we are over our wine together. I hope that the arrangement thus made will not interfere with any engagement previously made by you.”

“I had no engagement for this evening,” answered the Countess, now more than ever convinced, that her husband was altogether ignorant of what had passed between herself and the Duchess of Devonshire on the preceding day, and that he was likewise unaware of the feeling which the Prince entertained towards her; or else, she was assured, he would not have invited his Royal Highness to the house.

“I need scarcely ask you to give such instructions, Eleanor,” resumed the Earl, “that the entertainment may be worthy of the illustrious guest who is to honour us with his presence: nor is it needful for me to intimate my desire that, although the banquet be of the most private character, it will become us to appear in full dress.”

“I should have anticipated your wishes in those respects, Francis,” said the Countess, her heart fluttering like an imprisoned bird: that is frightened in its cage, and the colour coming and going on her cheeks a dozen times in a minute.

The Earl then retired, and Eleanor, not daring to trust herself alone with her reflections, rang the bell and ordered the house-steward to wait upon her. That functionary soon made his appearance; and the Countess issued the necessary orders for the banquet. There were but three hours left for the preparations: but money and many servants can accomplish marvels; and her ladyship felt assured that the entertainment would be a magnificent one.

Having instructed the house-steward, Eleanor proceeded to her own chamber, where she issued the requisite commands to her two lady's-maids re-

specting her toilette;—but when this was done, she found that she had still a couple of hours to while away. She accordingly ordered the carriage, and paid a visit to her friend the Duchess of Devonshire, whom she confidently acquainted with the circumstance that his Royal Highness was to dine at Desborough House in the evening. The conversation, therefore dwelt entirely upon this subject; and as a demirep is invariably anxious to make her beautiful acquaintances or companions as bad as herself, the Duchess said everything she could to inflame the imagination of Eleanor in respect to the Prince: so that when the Countess returned home to dress for dinner, her heart palpitated and her bosom heaved with pleasure at the thought of the delightful evening which she was to pass.

Precisely at eight o'clock his Royal Highness made his appearance, and was conducted to the drawing-room, where he was received by the Earl and Countess of Desborough.

Eleanor was gloriously handsome. The grave bashfulness which her nobly-formed countenance wore, imparted a queen-like air to her whole appearance, and contrasted charmingly with the radiance which the diamonds on her raven hair and the lustre of her splendid black eyes diffused around her. She seemed a magnificent vision too perfect for human beauty—a houri of madness to paradise, invested with all the supernal fascination of that elysian sphere.

And, in spite of herself—in spite of all the command which, prompted by her woman's pride and her natural virtue, she had resolved to exercise over her feelings,—in spite, we say, of the immense efforts which she had made to counteract, or rather to subdue, the influence of that insidious language which the Duchess of Devonshire had poured into her ears,—her bright eyes grew brighter beneath the impassioned gaze which the Prince riveted upon her—and her hand trembled in his own, as he took it with apparent respect, but in reality pressed it gently—and the half-revealed bosom to which his looks then wandered and where they settled gloatingly, heaved to the sigh of pleasure which she could not control.

She remembered not the insolent threat to which the royal voluptuary had dared give utterance on leaving her; the last time she had seen him:

she thought only that he was the strikingly handsome man the Duchess of Devonshire had loved to paint him in glowing terms; and the consciousness that she was blushing made her blush all the more deeply—while the flood of light that poured into her swimming eyes dazzled and almost bewildered the Prince as he met the glance which flashed upon him from those brilliant orbs.

All these feelings—and emotions—and variations of countenance, which would occupy a whole chapter in order to detail them fully, passed during the few seconds that his Royal Highness held the fair soft hand of that charming lady in his own; then, as she resumed her seat upon the sofa whence she had risen to welcome him, he placed himself by her side, and began to converse in that melodious yet manly voice which possessed so irresistible a sweetness for the fair sex.

Several minutes elapsed ere the Countess could so far compose her thoughts and regain her self-possession as to take part in the discourse which her husband however sustained with all the spirit of a fine intellect and an elegant taste; and in a short time a domestic entered to announce that dinner was served up.

The Prince gave his arm to Lady Desborough; and as they descended the stairs she felt that he pressed that arm gently with his own—but not in a manner which could have given offence, or been interpreted otherwise than as accidental, even if she had possessed courage and self-command enough at the moment to resent that silent evidence of his passion.

The table, although only laid with three covers, would have presented a superb spectacle to any one unaccustomed to such magnificence. It groaned beneath the burthen of the costliest gold plate, which shone brilliantly in the lustre of the chandelier suspended to the ceiling, and the light of which was reflected in numerous mirrors.

Amidst that glorious flood of radiance, the handsome Eleanor seemed a goddess in her own Olympian sphere of light;—and so dazzled was the Prince by her transcendent charms that, epicure as he was, he had scarcely any appetite for the variety of delicacies now served up.

The Earl appeared to be in excellent spirits; and even when his Royal Highness, carried away by the enthusiasm

of his feelings, looked and spoke more tenderly with regard to the Countess than a jealous husband would have admired,—and when she, influenced by the same irresistible emotions, gave answers in a voice of silver tremulousness and blushed beneath the rapturous glances thrown upon her,—the nobleman continued to discourse with an increased gaiety—as if, beholding nothing amiss, he abandoned himself to the pleasure of the evening.

The various courses were disposed of—and at length the dessert was placed upon the table. Shortly afterwards the Countess rose to withdraw; and the Prince hastened to open the door for her, no servants being then in the apartment.

She bowed in acknowledgment of this honour; and as she passed out of the room, with that graceful carriage of the arching neck and sloping shoulders for which she was so eminently distinguished, the Prince said in a low and hurried whisper, “Angelic being! I adore you!”

Then, as she crossed the threshold, he beheld the rich blood mantling up over that neck and those shoulders; and he returned to his seat with the inward conviction that he had already gone far towards the accomplishment of a complete triumph over her.

“Your position is a most enviable one, my dear friend,” said his Royal Highness, to the Earl of Desborough as the claret-jug passed between them; “you assuredly possess as your wife the handsomest and most amiable lady in England.”

“Yes—Eleanor is indeed all that is most fascinating and adorable in female shape,” returned the nobleman. “But, with the permission of your Royal Highness we will now terminate that little transaction—”

“If you please, Desborough,” answered the Prince, “I really know not how to express my gratitude for this most unexpected and generous act on your part. But whenever the time may come that this hand of mine shall be enabled to affix a signature to a document in order to make it law, your earldom shall be changed into a marquise, which is not far removed from the dukedom that shall speedily follow after.”

“Your Royal Highness will only afflict me by the promise of reward,” said the nobleman.

“I am aware that the deed is one of pure friendship on your part,” hastily

returned the Prince: "nevertheless, I should be wanting in gratitude; did I not express my inclination, although at present utterly deficient in the power, to make a suitable acknowledgment of the great service you are rendering me," and so forth.

While the heir-apparent was thus delivering himself of frothy phrases, the hollowness of which was perfectly understood by the Earl, who well knew the selfishness of his royal guest,—twenty bank-notes for a thousand pounds each had been counted down on the table by the nobleman; and the Prince, amassing them all together as if they were a bundle of play-bills, thrust them into his waistcoat-pocket: then, drawing forth a letter, he tore off a piece of the back, and with a gold pencil-case scribbled an I. O. U., which he handed to the Earl.

Thus ended this little matter; and the prince continued to enjoy his wine, the nobleman keeping him company glass for glass. The conversation turned upon a variety of topics: but every now and then his Royal Highness could not prevent himself from saying something complimentary in respect to Lady Desborough; on which occasions the Earl invariably directed the discourse as speedily as possible into another channel.

"I feel so comfortable and so entirely at home," said the Prince at last, "that I could almost wish I was to be your guest for a week, Desborough—instead of only for another hour," he added, looking at his watch. "In fact, I hate having to quit warm rooms and pass through the ordeal of a cold ride in a carriage."

"Your Royal Highness can easily avoid that ordeal," observed the nobleman. "A bed-chamber is at your service beneath my roof: and indeed," he exclaimed hastily, "I should esteem myself highly honoured were your Royal Highness to condescend to sleep in my humble abode."

"Upon my honour," ejaculated the Prince, as the thought flashed to his memory that the Earl and Countess did not sleep together—a circumstance which we have already stated to be notorious,—"upon my honour, I am inclined to accept this invitation."

The nobleman walked to the window—drew aside the curtain—and looked forth upon the square.

"The night is bitterly cold," he said, returning to his seat: "there is a hard frost—and the pavement is quite

white. It is enough to give any one his death, merely to pass from the front door into a carriage."

"I hate the cold," cried the Prince, shuddering at the idea of facing the bleak air. "Well, Desborough, I accept your invitation—and I will sleep here to-night."

"The Earl accordingly rang the bell, and ordered the servant who answered the summons, to direct the chamber-maids to prepare the best apartment, as his Royal Highness intend to pass the night at the mansion. The domestic bowed and retired; and shortly afterwards another lacquey came to announce that coffee was served in the drawing-room.

Thither the heir-apparent and the Earl proceeded. Eleanor was seated on the sofa: her cheeks were flushed—her eyes shone brilliantly—and there was an agitation, a feverish excitement in her manner which she could not altogether conceal, much less subdue. The truth was, she had already heard from the servants that his Royal Highness intend to sleep at the mansion; and although there was nothing surprising in the circumstance of her husband having given such an invitation; yet the fact that the Prince had accepted it—nay, she felt assured, must have thrown out some hint which elicited it—was too significant not to be understood by the lady.

Then—Oh! then, how violent was the struggle which had taken place between her virtue and her inclinations: how tumultuous was the agitation which filled her heart, as her physical and her moral nature warred together:—how dire was the conflict between the flesh and the spirit! There was a woman imploring heaven to keep her chaste—clasping her hands and beseeching her God to preserve her in the path of duty—exerting every energy to maintain her footing in the ways of rectitude,—but yielding—bending—succumbing beneath the weight of indomitable passions—burning with the fiercest desires! The battle was maddening—the strife was excruciating: Oh! how she prayed for strength—for succour: and yet her strength failed her fast—and succour came not. She resolved to retreat to her own chamber—to send by a servant an apology for her absence with a plea of indisposition; but scarcely had she thus determined, when voices on the landing without met her ears—and she had barely time to seat her-

self on the sofa before the Prince and her husband made their appearance.

No wonder, then, that her cheeks were flushed—that her eyes shone with a brilliancy that was wild and feverish: no wonder that her heart palpitated violently and she gave a sudden convulsive start, as the heir-apparent placed himself by her side upon the sofa.

And he noticed her emotions, but divined not the true cause: his licentious, profligate, and demoralised nature led him to mistake the results of that severe internal wrestling for the evidences of a passion as heated, as inflamed, and as longing as his own. The Earl, having thrown one rapid glance upon his wife, examined some new China ornaments which had that day been placed upon the mantel-piece: it was therefore clear to Eleanor that he either did not perceive anything strange in her appearance, or that if he did it engendered no unpleasant suspicion in his mind.

Relieved and consoled by the circumstance that her excitement had thus again escaped the observation of her husband,—and summoning all her fortitude to her aid,—the Countess of Desborough assumed a composure, almost verging to a gaiety, which she did not entirely feel: and in the endeavour to seem cheerful, contented, and free from any cause of annoyance or embarrassment, she over-played her part. The consequence was that her manner appeared so supremely happy—her discourse sparkled with such gems of wit and flashes of intellect—her laugh was so melodiously hearty—and her smiles were so enchantingly radiant, that it was impossible for her to prove more agreeable.

The coffee was handed round—the Prince and the Earl each took a small glass of exquisite *liqueur*—and the conversation was progressing in the same brilliant style as before, when his Royal Highness, in quoting a line of poetry, attributed it to the wrong author. Eleanor corrected him: but he declared that he was right. Thereupon the Earl, starting from his seat, volunteered to fetch from the library a volume which would set the matter at rest; and he left the room.

But scarcely had the door closed behind him, when the Prince, seizing the hands of the Countess, pressed them to his lips, covering them with kisses.

"Oh! you are determined to ruin me, body and soul!" murmured Elea-

nor, allowing her head to droop upon his shoulder, so that her hair mingled with his and her soft warm cheek lay against his own.

"Ruin you, my angel!" cried the Prince throwing his arms about her neck and straining her to his bosom: "I would die to promote your happiness! O Eleanor—dearest Eleanor—I love—I adore you: drive me not to despair!"

And, unwinding his arms, he raised her head with his hands, and imprinted a thousand kisses upon her lips,—burning kisses which she returned—yes, she returned—for she was now borne headlong on the torrent of voluptuous feelings into which her fate appeared to plunge her.

"Dearest—dearest Eleanor!" whispered the Prince; "you cannot fail to suspect wherefore I have remained here to-night. Again, therefore, I say—do not drive me to despair. Murmur in my ears a single word—an instruction to guide me to your chamber—"

And once more he strained her to his breast; once more he covered her charming, blushing, burning, countenance with kisses;—and in the delirium of the moment—in the intoxication of ineffable feelings—in the whirl of all the tenderest emotions which woman's heart can know, the yielding Eleanor *did* murmur the few words of instruction which her daring companion craved.

Then, tearing herself from his embrace, she smoothed her hair and her dress, strove to tranquillise her sensations and compose her features ere her husband returned to the room.

Fortunately on her account, several minutes yet elapsed before he made his appearance; otherwise he could not have failed to observe the thrilling excitement which possessed his wife, and whence she found it so difficult to recover.

Apologising for his prolonged absence on the ground that he could not immediately find the book which he sought, the Earl of Desborough opened the volume he carried in his hand; and the Prince of Wales was compelled to acknowledge that he was wrong in his opinion and that the Countess was right.

This point being settled, the conversation was pursued until near twelve, when Eleanor rose to withdraw. The Prince took her hand; and as he pressed it warmly but rapidly, he darted upon her a glance so full of meaning

that she was forced to turn away immediately in order to conceal the burning blush which that look called up to her features.

The moment the Countess had quitted the room, a deep and sudden sadness fell upon the Earl—a sadness so profound, so strange, so irresistible, that the heir-apparent could not help observing it. The nobleman complained that indisposition had thus abruptly seized on him; and, endeavouring to smile, he declared it to be nothing—a mere trifle—and already passing away. But that smile—oh! it was so ghastly—so deathlike—so positively hideous, that the Prince was alarmed; and, imagining that the Earl was about to faint, he rushed towards the bell.

Lord Desborough started up—caught the hand of his Royal Highness just as it touched the bell rope—and exclaimed, “No—no—I am better now—I assure you that I am! But there are moments when this sudden indisposition, to which I am subject, seizes upon me with excruciating agonies.

The Earl immediately rallied; and the Prince was fully satisfied with the explanation which had been given. They remained conversing together for a few minutes longer; and then Lord Desborough in person conducted his Royal Highness to the chamber prepared for him.

The chandeliers were extinguished in the dining and drawing-room—one by one, but in quick successions, the domestics ascended to their rooms—one by one also the lights disappeared from the windows of their respective chambers; and in a short time a profound silence reigned throughout the spacious mansion.

The church-clocks were proclaiming the hour of one, when the door of the Prince's apartment was opened slowly and cautiously;—and his Royal Highness stole forth into the passage, where a lamp was burning.

But scarcely had he crossed the threshold, when an ejaculation of surprise fell upon his ears;—and to his horror and dismay, he found himself face to face with the Magsman!

this ruffian conjured up in his mind all in a moment,—the heir-apparent could not utter a word; but stood gazing in speechless terror and surprise on the hang-dog countenance which, once seen, could never be forgotten.

“Well, I'm blowed if this isn't the rummest lark I ever knew in my life!” said the Magsman at length; for, well aware that the Prince would not venture to alarm the house and give him into custody, he was as free and independent as possible.

“For heaven's sake, come this way!” whispered his Royal Highness, now recovering the powers of speech, and uttering these words in a voice of mingled entreaty and command.

The Magsman accordingly followed the Prince into the bed-chamber, the door of which his Royal Highness carefully closed.

Scarcely, however, had that door shut, where the Countess of Desborough came airily and lightly down the passage—but with trembling limbs, a countenance ghastly pale, and a bosom upheaved with the suspended breath. For she had left her own door ajar—she had heard that of the Prince open, in spite of the caution which he observed—then she had heard the ejaculation of surprise which had fallen from the Magsman's lips, but which her fancy, influenced by the sudden terror that seized upon it, tortured into an exclamation of rage—next came the sounds of whispering voices—and lastly the door of the heir-apparent's chamber closed again. She looked forth into the passage: no one was there. Her fears rose to an intolerable height. She felt convinced that her husband, suspecting the understanding into which the Prince had drawn her, had watched in the passage—had intercepted his Royal Highness as he was about to seek her apartment—and had followed him into his own chamber, either to cover him with reproaches, or perhaps for some more desperate purpose. For Eleanor had heard of duels fought across tables, by persons holding handkerchiefs between them so that there should be no flinching and no retreat without the imputation of cowardice; she had also read of injured husbands taking the law in their own hands in a very summary manner, and shooting without remorse those adventurous gallants who had either debauched their wives or endeavoured to seduce them;—and, knowing the high feel-

CHAPTER LXII.

THE PRINCE AND THE MAGSMAN.

ROOTED to the spot—paralysed, as it were—transfixed by the varied feelings which the sudden apparition of

ings and exalted sentiments which her husband entertained, she was struck with the appalling idea that he would not hesitate to wreak his vengeance on his treacherous guest, all Prince and heir-apparent though he were!

Quick as lightning did this train of reflections sweep across the mind of the unhappy lady, convulsing her whole form with anguish, blanching her cheeks, and suspending her very breath; and, under the influence of that fearful consternation, did she hurry along the passage—step noiselessly up to the door of the Prince's chamber—apply her ear to the key-hole—and listen with the attention of an awful interest to what was taking place within.

But her feelings, so tensely wrung—so excruciatingly tried, speedily experienced a boundless relief in one sense,—although only to undergo a painful transition into a state of ineffable wonderment, indignation and deep humiliation.

Let us however describe the scene that took place in the chamber at the door of which the noble, elegant, and handsome Countess of Desborough was playing the part of eaves-dropper.

"What are you doing in this house?" demanded the Prince, after a long hesitation how he should address the ferocious ruffian who, leaning against the bed-post, surveyed him with cool defiance.

"I suppose. I've just as much right to ask you the same question," was the insolent response: seeing that it's no more your house than it is mine."

"Do you forget who I am, sirrah?" exclaimed the Prince, the words hissing through his set teeth—for he was quivering with a rage that was all the more furious because of its utter impotency.

"Well, I can't say that I do," answered the Magsman. "You're the heir to the throne—and a precious rum heir you are, too. But it seems that you forget who I am: and so I'll just tell you. My name's Joseph Warren—I don't *Esquire* myself, you see: better known by intimate friends as Joe the Magsman. My wife is that dear soul who now passes in the fine world as Mrs. Brace, and whom you've done me the honour to make your mistress. Yes—and I haven't the slightest doubt that she's your go-between—and pander—and procuress—and everything else good and agreeable. Lord bless ye I'd ye think I can't

read the secret of that fine establishment she keeps, and all those pretty girls that she has about her. But why do you stand looking at me in that savage style?" I'm only telling you the truth. By the bye, I must thank your Royal Highness for the five hundred guineas you sent me three or four weeks ago through my wife——"

"Wretch! will you make an end of this hideous bantering?" cried the Prince, bewildered and enraged to a degree that amounted to positive anguish.

"You don't appear to have anything to say for yourself," returned the villain, in a jeering tone: "and therefore I must speak for you. It wouldn't be genteel on my part to treat your Royal Highness with contemptuous silence."

"Again I demand—what are you doing in this house?" exclaimed the Prince heedless of the fellow's observations.

"And on my side I ask—what were you doing in that sneaking way in the passage?" retorted the Magsman. "But come,—let us be candid with each other. You are the Prince of all the rakes and demireps at the West End—and I'm the Prince of all the buzgloaks, prigs, cracksmen, and flash coves elsewhere. So we meet on equal ground, you see. Well then—let's have no nonsense between us. I'm here to rob the house—and you were going to creep along the passage to some expectant fair one's bed-chamber: as likely as not the lady of the mansion herself—for you're quite capable of it."

"My God! what shall I do with this wretch?" exclaimed the Prince, in a tone of despair. "Villain," he immediately afterwards exclaimed,— "you have escaped from Newgate—and one word will alarm the house and send you back to your old quarters."

"Quite true, Prince of Profligates," responded the Magsman: "but that one word you don't dare to utter."

"What do you require?—what can I do to persuade you to depart forthwith?" demanded the heir-apparent goaded to desperation by the idea that the charming Eleanor was expecting him: for he little thought that she was so near at hand, and listening in horrified amazement and speechless indignation to every word that thus passed between himself and the Magsman.

"What do I require?—what can you do to persuade me to depart?" repeated the ruffian. "Why—I'll tell you in a very few words. I've two pals with me, who're waiting very quietly down in the front kitchen till I go back to them after this little reconnoitre that I was taking of the house when I ran against you. Make it worth our while to bundle off at once—and I can assure you, we shall be much better satisfied to finger some hard cash than run a risk of being seen going out with a parcel containing plate and such like little matters."

"Then you have two companions with you?" said the Prince, exerting all his moral powers to master the rage, vexation, and bitter annoyance which this scene caused him to experience.

"Yes—and they'll agree to any bargain I make with you," replied the Magsman, who saw all along that he had the game in his own hands.

"Now, listen—one word will settle this affair," resumed his Royal Highness, in feverish haste. "Five hundred guineas shall be sent to you to-morrow at any place you choose to appoint —"

"That will do," interrupted the Magsman. "I know I can rely on your word—because you don't dare break it with me. One of my friends down stairs will call at Carlton House to-morrow at mid-day, and ask if there's any letter for Mr. Smith. He's a genteel chap—Dick the Trumper—and he'll dress up swell for the occasion."

"Let that be the understanding," said the Prince. And now you will undertake to depart—"

"Yes—me and my two pals. I won't waste time by introducing them to you—although they'd be charmed to make your acquaintance. But we'll be off—and what's more, the people of the house shan't suspect to-morrow morning that the place has been entered during the night. It was fortunate that the kitchen window was left unfastened—and so there was no cutting out of panes of glass, or any need to use the jemmy. Good bye, illustrious Prince: and now you may be off to Lady Desborough's bed, if it was her chamber that you was going to."

With this coarse peroration, the volubility of which his Royal Highness did not dare interrupt, for fear of offending the Magsman and producing that disturbance in the house which he had been so anxious to avoid,—the

formidaable ruffian stole gently out of the apartment: but the slight creaking which the door made on being opened, drowned the noise on *another door* which closed at the same moment at the end of the passage.

His Royal Highness drank a deep draught of water to cool his parched throat, the instant that he found himself alone. He then sank into an arm-chair near the fire that was now smouldering in the grate and endeavoured to compose his countenance and settle his thoughts.

By degrees he began to congratulate himself on having avoided a disturbance and exposure in the mansion—notwithstanding that this result had been accomplished at the expense of so much humiliation and by the endurance of such cutting insolence:—and, having succeeded in tranquillising his mind, he resolved to proceed to the chamber of the Countess.

Cautiously did he emerge a second time from his apartment—stealthily he tread along the passage—and in a few moments he reached the door of the room where he hoped to reap a rich reward for the annoyance he had so recently experienced.

But that door was fastened. He knocked gently: there was no response. He knocked again: still all was silent. He listened: no one moved within. Could he have mistaken the chamber? Impossible! for it was the last in the passage, on the left hand. A third time he knocked: and now a light step was heard approaching that door. It was about to be opened!—he was already standing on the threshold of paradise! The blood boiled in his veins with the excitement of passion deeply stirred: his heart palpitated violently. Glorious recollections of all the transcendent charms of the Countess swept through his memory in a moment. She was coming—and he was about to be happy!

"Who is it?" demanded her soft and silvery voice—but, as the Prince fancied, somewhat abruptly.

"'Tis I, my angel—your adorer!" he whispered.

"Then I command your Royal Highness to retire to your own chamber," was the stern and imperious response.

And he heard her retreat with a rapid step from the door.

For a few instants he stood stupefied—amazed—astounded: then all the indignation of his haughty soul and all the pride of his princely rank

asserting their empire, he turned away—disdaining to implore a syllable of explanation.

At an early hour he rose from a sleepless couch, and immediately ordered his carriage. A few minutes afterwards the Earl of Desborough made his appearance, and begged his Royal Highness to remain and partake of the breakfast which was already served up. But the Prince declined in terms so positive as to be almost rude:—and it was even with a certain degree of coldness which he could not master, that he took a hasty leave of the nobleman.

The instant that they had thus separated, a glow of indescribable pleasure suffused itself over the countenance of the Earl of Desborough: and hurrying to his own chamber, he threw himself on a seat weeping for very joy!

CHAPTER LXIII:

THE CONDEMNED SERMON.—

THE EXECUTION.

It was Sunday morning;—and the Chapel in Newgate prison afforded a scene of deep and dreadful interest.

The galleries, respectively allotted to the males and females, were filled with prisoners, who presented a somewhat more cleanly appearance than on the occasion of Mrs. Brace's visit to the establishment; for the threat which was invariably held out on the Sabbath, of stopping the roast beef of those who did not wash for chapel, had produced the desired effect.

In the large circular pew in the middle of the place of worship, Martin and Ramsey were seated. Soper, armed with his keys, kept watch upon them; but his precaution was unnecessary—for escape was impossible!

Consistently with the barbarian cruelty which characterised all the proceedings of what was termed 'justice,' and suitable with all the law's demands and exigencies, in the time of that detestable monarch, George III, the black coffins intended for the two criminals were placed at their feet, inside the enclosure.

The adjacent pews were filled with elegantly dressed ladies—some from the City, and others from the West End,—but all attracted thither to listen to the Condemned Sermon, and see the doomed men who were to be hanged on the following morning

Oh! talk not of the vitiated taste, and the morbid curiosity which influence the multitudes that flock to places of public execution; for if rags and tatters go thither, silks and satins were ever wont to repair to the Chapel of Newgate to hear the funeral exhortation of the Ordinary, until the proceeding amounted to a scandal and a shame which rang throughout Europe. Then the authorities interposed—and a salutary prohibition was the result.

But on the occasion of which we are writing—in those "good old times" which the people's oppressors love to prate about,—the Sabbath preceding the day of public strangulation, was invested with all possible horrors for the two condemned wretches, and with all possible entertainment for the well-dressed gentlemen and elegantly attired ladies who had been *fortunate* enough to obtain tickets of admission.

Separated from all the rest—rendered most painfully conspicuous—enclosed in that circular pew, Martin and Ramsey were enduring the damnable tortures of a moral Inquisition preparatory to the infernal crowning catastrophe.

If they raised their eyes, they beheld a bigotted, dogmatic, and superstitious Ordinary, endeavouring to establish a reputation for pulpit eloquence at the expense of *their* feelings already so acutely wrung:—if they looked around them, they saw beauteous face gazing intently upon them, and bright eyes watching every movement of their muscles with the keenest curiosity:—and if they glanced downward, their vision was appalled by those black objects of sinister shape which stood at their feet.

It was horrible—horrible!

And yet those two doomed men were expected to compose their thoughts to prayer, and fix their ideas only and wholly upon the eternity into which they were soon to be hurried!

But—Almighty God! how was this possible? Turn whichever way they would, their eyes encountered something to recall their imaginations most painfully—most agonisingly to the affairs of this world, and to the beings who render it a scene of barbarism, wretchedness, and oppression.

Oh! would it not have been better far to allow those men, already hovering between two spheres—that of mortality and that of eternity,—would it not have been more humane, more just, more consistent with true religious

feeling to leave them each in his solitary cell, and thither send the minister of Christ to console—to soothe—to pray—and to promise!

Wherefore permit those curious spectators to flock thither on such an occasion?—why convert the temple of worship into a stage for the representation of a melo-drama of thrilling interest?—why place the emblems of the grave at the feet of the doomed wretches?

Because all these proceedings were consistent with the despotic times and sanguinary laws of George III.—that monarch who was made up of madness, bigotry, deception, and bloody-mindedness; because everything in that age was done with a view to strike terror into the public mind and thereby check civilization, freedom, and progress;—and because our legislators and rulers invariably support those systems of cruelty, barbarism, tyranny, superstition and wrong, which the millions are enlightened, enough to denounce, and humane enough to shudder at!

In a retired corner of the Chapel, George Woodfall—that young and interesting artist who has already been introduced to our readers—was seated. He was led thither by no sentiment of morbid curiosity; his nature was above such an ignominious feeling. But he had been sent by his griping old master—the greedy, avaricious picture-dealer—to study the countenance of Philip Ramsey, in order to transfer it to canvass at his leisure. For so much interest had attached itself to the trial of the forgers, and so highly had the press spoken of the handsome appearance and elegant manners of the younger convict, that Mr. Shrubsole felt assured of obtaining a speedy sale, and a good price for the portrait of this individual.

The reverend Ordinary droned through a long, and clumsily composed sermon, by the details of which he had hoped to produce a thrilling effect upon his auditory; and if he could only succeed in wringing tears from the two condemned culprits—Oh! what a grand proof of his eloquence would that be—and what a telling circumstance it would be to have reported in the newspapers the following morning!

One or two of the elegant ladies who were assembled there, thought it was necessary to squeeze out a few tears; and Mr. Soper pursed up his

mouth, and endeavoured to look as sentimental as possible.

In the gallery, amongst the male prisoners, were the Big Beggarman and Briggs, to whose case the Ordinary likewise alluded—exhorting them, and other convicts, to take warning from the dreadful spectacle presented to their view by the occupants of the circular enclosure. This advice did not, however, seem to produce any salutary effect; for the Big Beggarman, stooping his head, whispered some very coarse remark to his fellow-convict Briggs, who responded in an equally irreverent manner.

The service was concluded; the prisoners, male and female, were marched back to their wards;—and the two doomed men were re-consigned each to his condemned cell. The congregation dispersed; and the Ordinary accepted an invitation to lunch with the governor of Newgate—well-knowing that in addition to such substantial or cheering comforts as cold pigeon-pie, bottled stout, and cherry-brandy, he should receive the more frothy, but scarcely less welcome, compliments which his sermon was expressly fabricated to elicit.

Damp, raw, and misty broke the fatal Monday morning; and immense crowds were collected in the Old Bailey; and in every avenue leading thither.

At the debtors' door of Newgate stood the terrible machine—the huge platform, with its black beams of towering high above the heads of the assembled masses.

The bell of St. Sepulchre, which had already begun to toll, appeared to have a gloomier sound than usual, as its iron tongue struck deep and solemn on the ear; more sombre than ever frowned the solid masonry of Newgate upon the gathered multitudes:—and the very air seemed to have acquired a more searching and penetrating chill.

Nevertheless, the crowds commenced their ribald jesting, practical jokes, and licentious conversation; for our precious rulers are either so besottedly ignorant, or so wilfully criminal as to demoralise the people by means of these accursed exhibitions of public strangulation.

But suddenly a dead silence fell upon the vast mass of spectators; and all eyes were fixed, as if spell-bound, upon the ominous scaffold.

Slowly came forth the funeral procession from the debtors' door: first the Ordinary made his appearance, with open prayer-book in his hands, and reading the service for the dead;—close behind followed the governor of Newgate;—then Martin and Ramsey, both pinioned in the usual manner, ascended the steps of the platform, accompanied by the executioner;—and lastly, the Sheriffs issued from the gaol.

The countenances of the doomed men were ghastly pale: but their lineaments were convulsed with no hideous workings. Rigid, as if the cold hand of the Destroyer lay already upon them, were those features. No tears fell from their eyes: the appalling consternation which was upon them had frozen nature's relieving fountain at its very source. Their senses were enchained as if under the influence of a frightful dream. Stiffened with dread horror, they could scarcely drag their limbs up the steps to the sable platform, in the middle of which were marked the outlines of the trap-door that opened *downward* beneath the fatal cross-beam. Their brains were seared and their feelings were blasted as if with lightnings. There was a tingling in their ears as if evil spirits were whispering awful things: the incantation of a black despair was upon them. An awful terror had paralysed all their faculties: it was a fearful stupefaction, combined with perfect consciousness of all that was passing—a species of night-mare which they could not shake off, and which held them dumb!

Placed beneath the fatal beam—there they stood transfixed, sustaining themselves on their legs by a kind of mechanical instinct, and not because they sought to meet their doom with firmness. The executioner fastened the ropes round their necks: and then, for the first time, they appeared to start from their automaton condition. For over the countenance of each did an indescribable passion of anguish pass: horror glared in their eyes—the spasmodic writhing which swept through their frames convulsed their features—and their ashy lips were suddenly compressed as if to keep down the cry of mortal agony that rose to the tips of their tongues.

But, in another moment, the white cotton caps were drawn over those countenances now really hideous—and the executioner, leaping down the

steps, entered the vast wooden box which formed the pedestal to that ominous gibbet above.

The Ordinary continued the funeral service—the multitudes, still maintaining a profound silence, kept their looks rivetted on the scene of horrible interest and fearful attraction.

Down came the trap-door—down fell the doomed men: but, Oh! their fall was suddenly stopped short by the ropes to which they hung;—and there they dangled in the air, dread spasms shooting through their frames—lightnings pouring up into their brain—their hands moving rapidly up and down with the convulsions of dying agony.

And as if the galvanism of that mortal anguish were suddenly wafted thoroughout the dense assemblage of spectators, a shudder swept over the entire mass; and even with the most brutalised and degraded, it did them harm to contemplate this awful spectacle of public strangulation.

In a few minutes, however, this feeling and that impression appeared to have lost all their effect: for, so soon as the Ordinary, the governor of Newgate, the executioner, and the Sheriffs had re-entered the prison, the practical jokes, the obscene jests, the bonneting, and the larking began all over again—while hawkers bawled out, "The last Dying Speeches and Confessions of Martin and Ramsey!"

And these printed lines were eagerly caught up by those who had a half-penny to give for them, although the purchasers well knew that no Dying Speeches had been made at all, and had read the confessions in the newspapers of the preceding day. But then those narrative had a rough and rudely executed wood-cut of a scaffold at the top—and *this* was the main attraction.

At nine o'clock the bodies were cut down and conveyed into the gaol, where it was understood that the corpse of Martin would be interred at midnight; but the remains of Ramsey had been claimed by some friends who were desirous to bury them elsewhere.

The crowds dispersed—and all the public-houses in the neighbourhood were soon filled; the scaffold was rolled away in the press-yard of Newgate—the Ordinary and the Sheriffs sat down to an excellent breakfast with the governor—and thus ended the accursed scene.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE PORTRAIT AND THE DREAM.

IT was about seven o'clock in the evening of that day on which Martin and Ramsey were executed; and we again find Mrs. Brace seated alone in her excellently furnished parlour. But a visitor was speedily announced: and this was the Prince of Wales.

"My dear Fanny," he said, flinging himself upon a seat as soon as he had removed his cloak,—"I have been anxious to see you for three or four days past: but I could not possibly find an opportunity. Octavia will, however, be here presently; and therefore I resolved to have half-an-hour's chat with you before her arrival."

"She believes, then, that you have just returned to town?" remarked Mrs. Brace, inquiringly.

"Yes; I longed to see the sweet girl again—and I wrote her a note this morning, stating that I came back to London last night, and that I hoped she would bless me with an interview here this evening. She is sure to keep the appointment," added his Royal Highness.

"And pray, have you ever thought how this amour is to end?" asked the milliner, who had lately begun to reflect that if an explosion should take place in that respect, her own establishment would be ruined. "To tell you the truth," she continued, "I look upon it as far more serious than any other love affair in which you were ever engaged—at least, within my knowledge. For here is a young creature, tender and confiding, and who believes you to be plain Mr. Harley, with a country-seat somewhere, and living at an hotel when in town: and it must happen, sooner or later, that accident will reveal to her your real rank. Then in the first feeling of anguish, she will betray all—everything—"

"My dear Fanny," interrupted the Prince, "I know all that you would say; and your alarms are not without foundation. Within the last few days I have myself reflected very seriously on this matter. In the first flush of that ardent passion with which the dear girl inspired me, all other considerations were absorbed; but awaking as if from a dream, I now perceive all the perils which are likely to ensue. To reveal myself to her, were impossible: to continue with the constant

risk that she may discover who I am, is fraught with danger."

"And if this amour should lead to other consequences?" said Mrs. Brace: if "Octavia should find herself in the way to become a mother—"

"I know not how to act—I am bewildered!" exclaimed the Prince, in a tone of deep vexation. "But we will talk over this matter on a future occasion. It was relative to the Countess of Desborough that I wished to speak particularly to you now."

"And it was likewise concerning her ladyship that I was anxious to see you," said Mrs. Brace; "for I felt assured there was something wrong in that quarter."

"Ah! how could you possibly have formed such a conjecture?" demanded the Prince.

"Because, on the very day after I called upon her ladyship, and the particulars of which interview I sent you in a hastily written note on my return home, one of her servants came with an imperative command that my account should be sent to her ladyship without delay. So urgent was the message, that I instantaneously complied: and in the course of that very same afternoon the sum due to me was brought by the same domestic. At the bottom of the bill were these words:—'*The Countess of Desborough will not in future trouble Mrs. Brace to wait upon her as hitherto with the newest fashions.*' This intimation," added the milliner, "is not to be misunderstood: it is a withdrawal of her ladyship's custom from my house."

"Conversation!—husband!" ejaculated Mrs. Brace, starting, and turning very pale.

"I will explain, myself," said the Prince.

He then related all those adventures in connexion with his visit to Desborough House, which are already known to the reader—merely suppressing the fact that the Earl had lent him twenty thousand pounds. But he mentioned how his lordship had invited him to dinner—how Eleanor had promised to admit him to her chamber—how he had encountered the Magsman—and how her ladyship's door was afterwards fastened against him.

"And did you yield to the extortion of that villain?" inquired Mrs. Brace, deeply humiliated at the thought that her own husband should thus have in-

sulted the Prince so grossly a second time.

"What could I do?" exclaimed his Royal Highness. "It was impossible for me to risk persecution and exposure at the hands of that man, who already knows too much concerning me," he continued; "and therefore the money was paid in the way he had stipulated. That the Countess must have left her chamber, listening at my door and overheard everything which took place between me and that scoundrel, is very evident. Hence her refusal to keep her promise and admit me to her room: hence also the summary manner in which she has withdrawn her custom from you. For that ruffian, whom I will not call your husband, said enough to make her ladyship understand that you and I were very intimately connected, and that all you had said to her in the morning was entirely on my behalf.

"You have therefore abandoned all hopes in that quarter?" said Mrs. Brace, interrogatively.

"Far from it!" exclaimed the Prince. "Those burning kisses which I gave and which were returned with equal ardour—those delicious toyings and that voluptuous dalliance in which I revelled for a few moments, during her husband's absence from the room—the deep hold which this passion has taken of my heart—and a certain sentiment of pride prompting me to triumph over the coy and haughty beauty,—all these motives, my dear Fanny, prevent me from abandoning my designs regarding the lovely Countess. I am maddened by the contemplation of her image: my veins boil with the fervour of my desires. And her own nature is so warm—so impassioned—so glowing, that it must be paradise to repose in her arms. By heaven!" ejaculated the Prince, with almost a wild emphasis,—“she shall be mine, by fair means or foul.”

"And it is for this purpose that you have sought my advice?" asked the milliner.

"Assuredly so," responded his Royal Highness. "Place all your powers of inventions upon the rack—torture your imagination to the extreme—but fail not to devise some project which shall give that delicious creature to my arms."

"For the life of me, I can think of nothing!" exclaimed Mrs. Brace. "Unless, indeed—"

"Unless, what?" demanded the Prince impatiently.

"Unless actual violence be resorted to—or some deeply laid stratagem," returned the milliner.

"Be it either—I hardly care which," added the impassionate George, "so long as we succeed. But I do not ask you to make up your mind at once: the matter is a serious one, and requires consideration."

"In the course of a day or two I shall devise some project," said Mrs. Brace.

At this moment Harriet entered the room, to announce that Miss Clarendon had arrived.

The Prince sprang from his seat, and hastened to the apartment where the beautiful girl was waiting for him.

She flew into his arms: and tears of joy streamed down her blushing cheeks, as she returned the ardent kisses which he imprinted on her moist red lips. Then she gazed with an expression of the most enthusiastic affection and admiration on the fine countenance of her seducer; and a passionate love shone in the splendid blue eyes of this charming creature.

Having compelled her to lay aside her bonnet and scarf, and seating himself by her side on a sofa, with his left arm encircling her waist and his right hand locked in her's the Prince said, "To me, dearest Octavia, it has appeared an age since last we met."

"And to me also!" murmured the lovely girl.

"Never did you seem so radiantly beautiful as you are this evening, my Octavia," exclaimed the Prince, at that moment forgetting the Countess of Desborough as completely as if there were no such being in existence.

"And never did you appear in my eyes so eminently handsome," was the soft response. "But even though we have been separated for an entire age, during your absence in the country," continued the charming Octavia, her eyes and countenance becoming overpoweringly brilliant in light and beauty as a glow of impassioned animation flooded her exquisite features—"I have nevertheless had something to console me," she added, with the most winning archness.

"Indeed!" cried the Prince, straining her affectionately to his bosom.

"Yes: your portrait!" said Octavia, with the same tone and manner of playful slyness.

"My portrait!" repeated his Royal Highness.

"It is as I tell you," continued Miss Clarendon. "A few days ago, my sister and myself visited a print-shop to purchase some drawings: and there we saw a portrait which had just been issued of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales."

"Ah!" ejaculated her lover, fixing his eyes upon her countenance in order to read in its expression whether she entertained any suspicion of his identity with the heir-apparent to the English throne.

"Yes," she resumed, with an artlessness of manner that relieved all his fears on that head in a moment: "the portrait of the Prince caught my view—and I was instantly struck by the extraordinary resemblance which it bore to you. Pauline made the same remark—and I purchased it. Oh! my dearest George, I can assure you that ever since that day I have passed hours at a time in gazing upon the noble countenance delineated on that paper; and the longer I have dwelt on it, the more wonderful has the likeness appeared. The same high and intellectual forehead—the same hair—the same facial outlines—even to the very expression of the features——"

"You flatter me too highly, charming girl, in thus comparing me to the Prince," said his Royal Highness; suddenly silencing her with a rapturous kiss.

"Oh! far from it!" she exclaimed throwing her arms about his neck; and retaining her countenance at a short distance from his own, she surveyed him with renewed earnestness and impassioned attention. "Is it not strange that the resemblance should be so perfect in all its details?"

"There are instances of extraordinary likenesses of this kind, my love," answered the Prince. "You have doubtless read in the newspapers the recent romantic trial in which Sir Richard Stamford bore a part; and you may remember that this gentleman is represented as strikingly resembling the Royal Family."

"Yes—I recollect," said Octavia. "But although I have never seen him, I do not think for a moment that he can bear so perfect a likeness to the Prince as yourself. And now, my beloved George, tell me when you intend to seek an introduction to my father, and visit us in Cavendish Square. Oh! I implore you to interpose no unnecessary delay in taking that step. There are times—pardon

me for speaking thus frankly—when I tremble from head to foot lest my father should discover the secret of my love—our stolen interviews——"

"Have patience, sweet Octavia, for a few weeks longer," said the Prince: "and then——"

"A few weeks!" she repeated, in a tone of almost anguished disappointment. "Oh! wherefore this long interval——"

"It is absolutely necessary that I should settle certain family affairs, my beloved Octavia," interrupted his Royal Highness—"before I can present myself at your abode. Be assured, however, that no farther delay shall take place——"

"But, in the meantime, what is to prevent your forming the acquaintance of my father?" asked Octavia, an indistinct doubt of her lover's sincerity—a doubt faint as the hue which the red rose-leaf throws upon the marble—agitating her mind for a moment, but softly and slightly as the flower waves in the still air; then, ashamed, and angry at herself for having allowed such a suspicion to flash across her mind even for an instant, she hastened to observe, "I believe all you tell me, dearest George—I have the utmost confidence in your love and in your honour: but, oh! you will render me completely happy—you will make me the most joyous being on the face of the earth—if you will only grant my request, and seek an introduction to my father."

The Prince was troubled by these words in which there was an appealing earnestness showing that Octavia was accustomed to reflect upon the delay which he interposed in becoming a visitor at Mr. Clarendon's dwelling upon the usual terms of acquaintance—prior to assuming the more decisive part of a suitor for the hand of that gentleman's elder daughter; and when he coupled this anxiety on her side with the affair of the portrait, he dreaded lest the most trivial incident or the slightest casualty should lead to a discovery of his princely rank.

"You are silent, my beloved—you appear to be vexed with me for having spoken so frankly on a subject which nearly and closely concerns my happiness?" exclaimed Octavia, with a sweetness of tone and manner that was charmingly seductive though unaffectedly natural. "Oh! I am certain that you cannot be offended with me, George! Remember that I have refus-

ed you no proof of my ardent and eternal affection ; and you surely will not deny me this easily accomplished testimony of your own. You say that you have family affairs to settle : but they cannot prevent you from forming new acquaintances, if you will. Even supposing that your relations should object to your union with me, they would not suspect that you entertained the idea of such an alliance from the simple fact of obtaining an introduction to our house. Besides, dear George, the time must come when you will accomplish your solemn vows—your sacred pledges—”

“ Can you doubt it, my beloved ?” exclaimed the Prince, scarcely knowing how to reply to a series of arguments which were incontrovertible. “ Do not question me for the present, I implore you: in a few weeks you will cease to have occasion for annoyance on this head. In love there must be a blind confidence—an implicit faith—a full reliance ;—or else it is not a sincere and deeply-rooted affection.”

“ Do you for a moment doubt my love ?” murmured Octavia, the tears starting forth upon her long lashes. “ Oh ! it were cruel, indeed, to suspect the intensity of that devotion—that worship which I experience towards you. For do you know, George, that if you were to prove faithless to me, I should go mad—or else I should end my days in suicide ? I could not survive the loss of your love ; it is the air which I breathe—it seems to have absorbed all other ties that bound me to existence ere I knew the happiness of thus loving and being beloved. And I will tell you what a strange—what a dreadful dream I had the other night : indeed, it was on the very night following the day on which I procured the portrait that I call *yours*. On retiring to my chamber, and after Pauline was asleep, I sat up for an hour contemplating that picture, and comparing all its lineaments with your own: for your image is so faithfully and accurately impressed upon my mind, that I see you before me, even when we are separated, as plainly as I behold you now. Well, having studied that portrait until its lips appeared to smile at me and its eyes to look love to mine, I retired to rest. Sleep came upon me; and then methought that I was seated with you in a delicious arbour. It was the spring-time; the blossoms fed the air with their fragrance—the heavens were of cloudless blue and stainlessly

sunny—and the birds carolled in their verdant retreats. We sat gazing upon each other in silence—our looks speaking more eloquently than our words could have done. Oh ! thus far the dream was elysian: my soul was bathed in happiness ineffable. But suddenly a gorgeous train of nobles and brilliantly dressed ladies appeared in sight ; and starting from your seat—tearing yourself from my arms—you hurried towards the procession, as if to command that it should pass on without recognising you. But a name was spoken by some voice—and that name was the Prince of Wales. The sickness of death came over me—and I fainted. When I returned to consciousness I fancied that utter darkness had closed in around me. Rising from the cold ground to which I had fallen I groped my way amidst densely interwoven shrubs and thickly growing trees, the dew from the foliage moistening all my garments and damping my hair which I believed to be streaming wildly and dishevelled over my shoulders. Suddenly I saw a light in the distance ; I advanced towards it ; every instant it grew stronger and stronger, until a glorious blaze of lustre flowed from the open portals of a church. Impelled by that strange influence which hurries us on in our dreams, and which, indeed, sometimes prompts us in our actions when we are awake, I entered the sacred edifice. With trembling steps, and an appalling presentiment of evil lying like a weight of lead upon my heart, I approached the altar, around which I beheld assembled that gorgeous train of nobles and ladies whom I had seen in the earlier portion of my vision. But *one* form stood out in proud contrast from all the rest ; and that form was thine, my George. But scarcely had my eyes settled upon you, when the solemn voice of the clergyman bestowed the nuptial blessing upon yourself and a lady whose hand you held in your own. A rending shriek escaped my lips—and I awoke. Nor was that shriek a part of the dream—but a real expression of indescribable anguish ; for Pauline had been awakened by it—and, seriously alarmed, she inquired what was the matter. I soothed her apprehensions on my account by telling her that I had experienced a horrible dream, but the nature of which I did not unfold to her. For the remainder of the night my feverish brow pressed a sleepless

pillow; and never—never was the dawn of morning more welcome. Oh! this dream has haunted me oftentimes since—yes, a hundred times during the few days which have elapsed since it occurred."

"But you put no faith in idle visions, my beloved?" said the Prince, more profoundly troubled than before at the strange narrative which had come from Octavia's lips, and which he would have interrupted more than once during the recital, had he not been enhanced by the species of fearful and prophetic interest wherewith it was invested. "Such a dream is easily accounted for, dearest," he continued "you had been gazing on a portrait in which you traced a resemblance to me—it was the predominant idea in your mind when sleep fell upon your eyes—and your imagination wreathed a host of wind and romantic fancies into the vivid and strongly-coloured texture of a vision."

"Oh! I am well aware that this is the true mode to account for it," exclaimed Octavia: "but it was not the less painful at the time—and the frequent trains of melancholy thought which its remembrance engenders, distress me occasionally more than I could possibly make you understand."

"Of what nature are those thoughts, my beloved?" inquired the Prince, determined to probe the young lady's mind to the very bottom, since the discourse had turned on this subject; and, moreover, he felt that he was already standing on the verge of an abyss.

"You will only chide me if I give you the explanation you desire, dear George," said Octavia, casting a timid look upon her royal lover.

"No—on the contrary, I wish you to be frank and explicit, my angel," returned the Prince: "for it is my duty and my desire to tranquillise all your misgivings," he added insidiously.

"Misgivings: Oh! I have none when with you," cried the lovely creature, pressing her lips upon his cheek. "But you ask me for an explanation of those thoughts which my dream has left behind, and which steal upon me at times in spite of every effort which I make to throw them off. For, when alone, or if at all dispirited, I find myself giving way to sad misgivings, akin to that vision, and which cause me infinite torture. I reflect that if you are indeed other than you have represented

yourself—if the portrait should prove to be so perfect a resemblance of you; because you are its real original—and if I have surrendered up my heart, and what is more—my honour—to the heir-apparent to the throne of these realms.—Oh! then madness or suicide would be the result. For innocence, is a balm even to the aching heart; but that anodyne would not be mine! On occasions, my thoughts are continued in another strain;—and instead of foreseeing madness or suicide as the crowning catastrophe, it appears to me as if all my love would turn to the bitterest hate, and that I would even throw myself at the feet of the King and demand justice against his son, my seducer! But, when I succeed in arousing my mind from these most painful reveries, I am so ashamed—so vexed—so angry at having given way to speculations so wild and suspicious so injurious, my beloved George, to you, that I am thrown into a perfect fever of excitement: and the blood circulates like lightning in my veins—my ears tingle—my tongue grows parched—my temples throb—my eye-balls burn! And now you will pardon me; my George, for having thus frankly unbosomed myself to you;—and you will cease to be astonished if I still urge my prayer that you will lose no time in obtaining from some mutual friend an introduction to my father."

"You know not how profoundly I am afflicted, my beloved Octavia," said the Prince, with his most melting tone and soothing manner, "by all you have told me this evening. The idea that I can possibly be any other than your own George Harley, is of course too ridiculous to need any protestation on my part. But that you should give way to such desponding thoughts at one time, and to such maddening reflections at another,—this it is that so deeply grieves me. Now, my adored girl," he exclaimed, in an impassioned tone, "I beseech you by that love which you bear for me—by that love which I entertain for you,—by all our past happiness and future hopes, Octavia,—do I conjure you to place unlimited confidence in me. I ask but a delay of six weeks: at the end of that time I will give you such reasons for my conduct as shall make you regret that you even for an instant mistrusted my sincerity. What those reasons are I cannot—must not—will not at present explain—"

"Oh! your anger would kill me!"

exclaimed the yielding and tender Octavia, flinging herself upon her lover's breast and weeping profusely. "Yes—I will grant the delay which you have demanded—My God! I have no alternative—And now kiss me—tell me that you are no longer chagrined with me: for, oh! your love has become so necessary to my happiness—it is a part of my very life!"

"Yes—I will kiss away those tears, my angel!" said the Prince, straining her in his arms.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE MILLINER'S PARLOUR.

We must now return to Mrs. Brace's parlour, into which Lord Florimel was introduced by Harriet, the lady's maid, a few minutes after the Prince of Wales had quitted it to join the lovely Octavia in another apartment.

"This is a pleasure which I little expected, my dear Gabriel," exclaimed the milliner,—"the promise you sent me in reply to my note, having remained unfulfilled for several days."

"I wish to God the note had never been sent to me at all!" cried Florimel throwing himself with an unfeigned air of vexation upon a seat.

"What can you mean?" demanded Mrs. Brace. "Was not the bearer a truly divine creature?"

"And it is precisely because a divine creature *was* the bearer of the letter that I am half-maddened by the result," returned Florimel.

"Indeed!" ejaculated the milliner, now recalling to mind the little incident which had occurred in respect to the charming daughters of Mr. Clarendon and Camilla Morton.

"I am driven to desperation," resumed Florimel. "Octavia and Pauline were passing my house when your beautiful messenger came out—and all kinds of detrimental suspicions have been the consequence. If you had sent an old hag of sixty there would have been no harm; but to make that sylph-like creature the bearer of your note—a heavenly being who appears to be in mourning for the deaths her fine eyes have inflicted—"

"She is indeed angelic," observed Mrs. Brace.

"Angelic!" repeated Florimel: "I must admit that all possible ideas of

female loveliness are realised and combined in her person—my own Pauline being left out of the question. But Pauline is as cruel as she is beautiful. Only conceive my astonishment—my grief—my despair, when, a few hours after your messenger had called—and just as I was about to pay a visit to Mr. Clarendon's house in Cavendish Square—a note came from Pauline, upbraiding me with my perfidy—explaining the reason of her anger—and begging that everything might be considered at an end with us."

"And can you not console yourself for the loss of Pauline, by the possession of Camilla?" asked Mrs. Brace. "If so, I promise you that the sweet girl shall become your conquest—"

"I dare not think of it!" interrupted Florimel, almost savagely. "And yet when I reflect that Pauline has not even condescended to notice the explanatory letters which I have sent her, and that she has refused to see me when I called —"

"This is a cruelty surpassing all I ever heard of," said Mrs. Brace. "It would bring the haughty beauty to her senses if you were to give her a rival in reality."

"I am so grieved—so vexed, that I know not how to act," exclaimed the young nobleman. "The truth is, as I have already assured you, that I love Pauline—worship—adore her—"

"But you are not to be made the butt of her caprices and whims," interrupted Mrs. Brace. "Come, my dear Gabriel—manifest an independent spirit."

"You seem most anxious that I should become the bidder in the market for this charming flower—this beautiful Camilla!" cried Florimel, in a tone of impatience: and yet he had not the moral courage to put an end to the discourse, or fly away from the sphere of temptation. "But the truth is, my dear friend," he continued hastily, "that young creature has only recently lost her parents—she is still in mourning for them—and it would be a scandal and a shame to wrong her. No—I could not do it—I could not do it!" he added emphatically, his better feeling obtaining the mastery over his mind.

"It would not be the first orphan whom you had seduced, Florimel," said Mrs. Brace.

"No; unfortunately. But I will not be tempted!" he exclaimed abruptly.

At this moment the door opened, and Camilla Morton entered the room, to make some inquiry of Mrs. Brace respecting a piece of work on which she was engaged; but, the instant she beheld that her mistress was not alone, she murmured a rapid apology for the intrusion, and was about to withdraw.

"Do not go away, my dear child," said the milliner; in that kind and motherly tone which she was in the habit of assuming towards her young ladies—especially to those who had not as yet fallen in the meshes of seduction: "that is Lord Florimel—that good nobleman to whom you took a letter for me the other day, and who has called to liquidate the demands, which I had upon his extravagant cousin. Now, my love, what is it you want to know?"

Camilla advanced with modest timidity holding in her hand the piece of work; and displaying it to her mistress, she put sundry queries, which Mrs. Brace took as long time to answer as possible. Indeed she elaborated her instructions so much that she succeeded in detaining the young girl upwards of five minutes in the room—during which interval Lord Florimel could not take his eyes off her. For her mourning garb rendered her so sweetly interesting and set off to such advantage the beauty of her complexion, that the nobleman felt all his good resolves thawing within him and all his grosser passions as rapidly excited.

When Camilla quitted the room, followed by the enraptured looks of Florimel,—she herself, however, not observing the intentness of his gaze,—Mrs. Brace said, with one of her most fascinating and archest smiles, "Is she not perfect?"

"Ravishing!" exclaimed the young nobleman, unable to subdue his enthusiasm. "If I did not love Pauline I could not love Camilla."

"And you will love her all the same," said the milliner; "Next Sunday evening you will sup with me; Camilla alone shall be present with us. In the meantime—for this is only Monday—I shall have leisure to insinuate into her mind all those little praises concerning you which praises produce so great an effect upon young persons."

"No—no—I will not come!" ejaculated Florimel.

"There can at all events be no harm

in your passing an agreeable evening urged Mrs. Brace.

"Well, well—I will think of it—I will let you know to-morrow," said Gabriel; and hastily shaking the milliner's hand, he took an abrupt departure.

"That matter is as good as settled murmured Mrs. Brace to herself as the door closed behind the retreating form of the young nobleman. "Camilla will be worth a thousand guineas to me in the very first instance."

Scarcely had the unprincipled—selfish—heartless woman made this reflection, when Harriet again entered, ushering in Mrs. Lindley, the old midwife of Fore Street, Lambeth. The servant immediately withdrew; and the harridan paid her respects to Mrs. Brace, glancing however suspiciously around the room to assure herself, with her habitual caution, that no listener was near.

"What brings you hither, my good friend?" inquired Mrs. Brace.

"Hush!—not so loud;—walls have ears!" murmured the midwife, speaking in a low whisper, and placing a long lean finger to her lip. "That dear girl, Caroline Walters—"

"Ah! what—already?" ejaculated the milliner, bending forward in an attitude of earnest attention.

"Hush—a miscarriage!" said the old woman who, having by this time put on her spectacles with the grate circular glasses, fixed her small dark reptile-like eyes through them upon the countenance of Mrs. Brace. "Yes—a miscarriage—"

"Well—that is a matter for rejoicing," observed the milliner. "But how is she?"

"Somewhat excited—irritable—and nervous," was the answer. "When the pains first took her, she insisted upon having a surgeon—and she grew quite violent because I remonstrated with her. I was therefore compelled to yield to her request; and she became comparatively tranquil. When the babe was born, and the doctor pronounced it to be dead, she insisted on seeing it; and weak and suffering as she was, such a terrible expression swept over her countenance that if I were to live for a thousand years I could not forget it. But—hush what noise was that?" demanded the midwife, with startled manner and in a hurried whisper.

"Nothing, nothing: a carriage in the street," returned the milliner.

"But this expression of countenance—"

"Was of the darkest—most fiend-like malignity," added the old woman. "I could not have supposed that such a young creature was susceptible of such a hellish passion as that which alone could have produced such a look. But then, as she herself has told me, Spanish blood circulates in her veins."

"And what can this fact have to do with the demoniac expression that her features suddenly assumed?" demanded Mrs. Brace.

"Vengeance upon her seducer!—vengeance on the father of that still-born babe!" replied Mrs. Lindley, in a so low a tone that her words would not have been audible were they in the least degree less emphatic. "I am accustomed to read the soul through the index of the countenance and never was a feeling more eloquently—more intelligibly—or more fearfully expressed upon human lineaments."

"You surprise—grieve—alarm me," said Mrs. Brace. "But perhaps it was the effect of a sudden paroxysm of pain—"

"No: I can easily distinguish between physical anguish and the workings of the mind," interrupted Mrs. Lindley. "So struck was I by the incident which I have mentioned, that I determined to call and communicate it to you by word of mouth; otherwise I should have merely announced the *accouchement* of Miss Walters, by means of a letter. But believe me, my dear madam," added the midwife impressively,—"believe me, I say, that this young girl meditates some scheme of infernal vengeance against her seducer; and such a proceeding might lead to an exposure of all the circumstances of the case, whatever they may be—"

"Yes—yes: I comprehend you," said Mrs. Brace, nervously; "and that exposure would perhaps involve the mention of my name in a manner extremely prejudicial to my establishment."

"That is precisely what I foresaw," observed the midwife; "and therefore I resolved to call and give you due warning of the vindictive sentiments which Miss Walters cherishes towards her seducer."

"I take it very kind of you, my good friend—I am infinitely obliged to you," exclaimed the milliner. "In the course

of the week I will call and see Caroline—and I shall be able to tranquillise her. If not, I must get her sent down into the country the moment she is well enough to leave your house."

"That would be by far the best plan," said Mrs. Lindley; "or else," she added after a short pause, "*out of the country altogether.*"

"Something of the kind, decidedly," returned the milliner. "By the bye Rachel Forrester will have to pay you another visit in the course of two or three weeks. You remember that I hinted something of this effect at the time when I introduced Caroline Walters to your establishment."

"I never forget any matter of business, my dear madam," said the midwife, suffering her features to relax into a smile, which was however grim and repulsive enough.

She then rose and took her departure.

It being now the hour when supper was served up in the young ladies' room, Mrs. Brace repaired thither to preside at the table; and it was eleven o'clock when she returned to her own private parlour. The Prince of Wales was waiting for her there, Octavia Clarendon having left him a few minutes previously.

"The evils which you presaged just now, my dear friend," he said, speaking in an agitated manner, "are already developing themselves. Octavia has obtained my portrait, *in which she discovers a marvellous likeness to Mr. Harley.* And no wonder, indeed! But she has likewise had dreams which have left strange thoughts behind; and the faintest whisper—the slightest incident will cause the whole fatal truth to flash her comprehension."

"She has told you all this?" said Mrs. Brace, seriously alarmed.

"Yes—and in the most artless manner possible," returned the Prince.

"Then wherefore did you not seize the opportunity to break to her gradually who you really are—"

"Because it is in the nature of man to put off the hour of evil or of danger as long as possible," interrupted his Royal Highness; "and because she frightened me by certain observations which she made."

"And those observations?" said the milliner inquiringly.

"Were to the effect that if I deceived her, she would throw herself at the feet of the King and demand justice!" responded the Prince, in a low and

solemn tone. "The danger is most serious—most menacing! It would be as much as all my prospects of wearing the crown are worth—"

"Yes: exposure would be terrible—ruinous!" said Mrs. Brace, in a musing manner.

"I have managed to obtain a delay of six weeks before the time when I have solemnly pledged myself to procure an introduction to her father," continued the Prince: "we have therefore ample leisure to decide upon some expedient. But if in the interval she should happen to see me in my carriage—however," he exclaimed suddenly interrupting himself, "we must leave it to the chapter of accidents. If there's an exposure, we can't help it; and if there be none, so much the better."

Having thus endeavoured to console and reassure himself, his Royal Highness put on his cloak and hat, and took his departure.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE "SUBJECT."

It was midnight: and Mr. Thurston was seated by the fire in his surgery, reading a medical book.

He referred to his watch and found that it was twelve o'clock precisely.

A dead silence prevailed throughout the dwelling: out in a few moments it was broken by the tinkling of the bell which hung in that room.

The surgeon startled from his seat—threw the volume upon the table—and, opening the door leading into the yard, hastened to unfasten the gate communicating with the stables.

Two men instantly entered the premises, carrying some heavy and sinister-looking object between them, and as the pale beams of a sickly moon flickered on their repulsive countenance, a cold shudder passed even through the frame of the phlegmatic, selfish, and usually imperturbable Thurston.

"Punctual you see, sir, as clock-work," whispered the Buzgloak.

"This way—quick!" said Thurston; and the two men followed him into the surgery, on the floor of which they threw their burthen heavily.

It was *something* long and supple, enclosed in a large sack!

We have already stated, in a previous chapter, that there were three doors to the surgery,—one communi-

cating with the consulting-parlour, the second with the yard, and the third with an apartment of which we promised to give further details.

Throwing open the door of this apartment, and leading the way with a light in his hand, Mr. Thurston bade the two men follow him with their burthen.

The room thus entered was small and nearly naked in respect to furniture. A long dissecting table—a pail to catch the fluid which flowed from a corpse when opened—a robe suspended to a pulley fixed to the ceiling and used to raise the head of the "subject" as high as the purpose of the experimentalist might require—and several anatomical instruments scattered about upon the table,—these were the principal features of the place. A dark green curtain covered the window, which was protected by iron bars: and the floor was strewn with coarse red sand.

Miles the Buzgloak and Dick the Trumper carried their burthen into this apartment; and while one retained a tight hold of the bottom of the sack, the other, removing a cord which closed the mouth, proceeded to drag forth its contents. A human head appeared—then the upper part of a man's body—and, the sack being abruptly drawn away, the entire form was exposed to view, dressed in the garments which it had on when cut down from the fatal beam in front of Newgate!

For "the subject" thus purchased by the surgeon was Ramsey the forger; and a portion of the halter still encircled his neck!

"The countenance was as colourless as Parian marble—but neither distorted nor hideous. All the convulsive workings which are inseparable from so violent a death as that of strangulation by the accursed cord, seemed to have subsided, by the subsequent relaxation of the features, into that calm and sleep-like placidity which follows an easy and natural dissolution. The eyes were closed—the long dark lashes resting motionless upon those cheeks whereon not a hue nor a tint of life was left: the mouth was partially open—the fine teeth gleaming between the pale lips. Over the brow fell curls of black hair, soft and silky as that of a woman; and it was easy to perceive that ere this countenance lost the animation of vitality, it must have been pre-eminently handsome and well calculated to make an impression on the heart of a susceptible lad."

"Well—what d'ye think of this here stiff'un?" demanded Miles the Buzgloak of the surgeon.

"Stiff'un be damned!" ejaculated Dick the Tramper. "It's as limp and yielding as a young baby; and a more lovelier corpse I never set eyes on. It's quite a pleasure and a recreation-like to surwey such a specimen of dead natur'—for I s'pose I may call it in that there manner."

"I'm blowed if you aint getting sentimental over it, Dick," said the Buzgloak, casting a look of deep disgust upon his comrade.

"And the sooner you place the body upon that table, the better I shall be pleased," exclaimed the surgeon, with an imperious motion of the hand.

"Heave him up, Miles," said the Tramper; and the "subject" was speedily stretched at full length on the dissecting-board, its head resting on the elevated part at one extremity.

Mr. Thurston then conducted the two men back into the surgery, where he counted down the stipulated sum.

"All right!" said the Buzgloak, taking up the coin. "At any future time, sir, we shall be glad of your orders as heretofore. You must admit that we did the thing well in this here instance—togging ourselves off spruce, and going to the Sheriffs as if we was Ramsey's most particular buzzim friends—"

"And imploring that the body might be given up to us to receive decent burial," added the Tramper.

"Ah! it was finely managed—and no mistake" continued Miles. White cambric fogles up to our eyes—a precious snivelling look about us—a few holler groans—"

"I have no doubt you played your part to perfection," interrupted Mr. Thurston. "Good night to you both," he added, with that abruptness which unmistakably told the two men he would rather have their room than their company.

They accordingly took their departure; and Mr. Thurston returned to the dissecting-chamber.

Holding the candle in his hand, he approached the table: but suddenly he started—and though naturally courageous as well as utterly devoid of superstitious belief, he staggered back a few paces, as the light was reflected in something shining on the face of the form stretched upon that table.

A second glance convinced the

surgeon that Ramsey's eyes were open; and at the same instant that this certainty flashed to his mind, the hanged man moved his head slowly round.

Thurston's terror—even if the feeling deserved so emphatic a name—was only momentary; and rushing up to the dissecting board, whereon he placed the light, he examined Ramsey's countenance with earnest attention for a few instants. Yes—he was alive: and the surgeon hastened to remove the cord from his throat: then having procured some restoratives from the pharmacy he applied them with such good effect that the criminal speedily revived.

But as he lay gasping with the efforts made by the expanding lungs to resume their functions, it suddenly struck Thurston that he was now placed in a most painful position. What was he to do with the man, should he completely recover? To hand him up again to justice were impossible; for such a step would render himself liable to the penalties of the law for having suborned individuals to obtain possession of the body by false and illegitimate means. To turn him adrift into the streets was an act from which even the selfish mind of the surgeon revolted;—and to keep him for any length of time at the house was dangerous as well as being repugnant to his feelings.

These reflections swept through the brain of Thurston as he stood by the side of the table, watching the spasmodic writhings which shook the strong frame of the man who was throwing off the coils of death:—and now consciousness slowly, slowly dawned in upon Ramsey's soul—but only as a feeble lamb, taken into a charnel-house, gradually and one by one lights up the horrors of the place.

First he remembered that he had been doomed to die: next his imagination showed him the terrible paraphernalia of the scaffold—the black beams—the countless crowds around; then the death-knell seemed again to be tolling in his ears, and his fancy revived the funeral service as it was droned forth by the Ordinary,—and lastly there was the fall of the fatal drop, followed by the tremendous jerk experienced at the throat, and the gush of blood, hot as fire, up into the burning, bursting brain.

Oh! how agonising was the spasm which shook the criminal from the hair of his head to the soles of his feet

as the slow operation of a languidly reviving consciousness brought his memory down to this appalling catastrophe;—and a hollow moan of anguish burst from his lips. Then closing his eyes, he seemed to exert all his powers to steady, collect, and settle his thoughts—so that he might assure himself how much was a horrible dream and how much was a hideous reality.

At length, slowly raising his heavy lids again, he fixed his looks searchingly upon the countenance of the medical man; and thence his eyes, wandered round the room, as if he were unable to comprehend where he was or what phase of existence, mortal or eternal, had succeeded the agonies produced by the fall of the drop.

But suddenly a light flashed upon his mind; and the convulsion which it caused him to experience unlocked his tongue.

"You are a surgeon," he said, in a faint voice:—and then his eyes were fixed beseechingly upon him to whom those words were addressed.

"Yes: but tranquillise yourself," answered Thurston: I will not betray you.

A feeble smile moved the lips of Ramsey as this assurance fell upon his ear; and Thurston, lifting the still powerless wretch from the table carried him into the surgery, where he placed him in an arm-chair before the cheerful fire that was still blazing in the grate. He next administered some hot brandy-and-water; and in another half-hour the criminal was resuscitated beyond all danger of a relapse.

"I will now tell you," said Thurston, "how I propose to act with regard to you. As a matter of course I know who you are and all about you: but prudence requires that you shall not know who I am or whereabouts in London this dwelling is situated. It will be impossible to remove you hence for some hours: you will therefore occupy a bed beneath my roof until to-morrow night—during which interval you will be comparatively restored to strength. I will then adopt measures to place you in a condition of security and beyond the reach of danger."

With tears streaming from his eyes did Ramsey pour forth his soul in gratitude to the surgeon who was thus performing—though rather in obedience to necessity than to his own free

will—the first generous action which had ever characterised his life.

Circumstances now absolutely required that Mrs. Thurston should be made acquainted with what had occurred. She knew that her husband expected a "subject" that night; and it was not, therefore, very difficult to break the truth to her. For it would have been impossible for the surgeon to lodge Ramsey in any bed-room without her knowledge; and her connivance was also necessary to prevent the domestics from suspecting that a guest was in the house under circumstances so mysterious as to lead them to hazard all kinds of disagreeable conjectures.

He accordingly informed Ramsey of the necessity which compelled him to make a confidant of his wife; and he quitted the surgery to seek her chamber for that purpose.

But scarcely had the door closed behind him, when a thousand wild and terrible ideas rushed to the imagination of the unhappy man whom he left seated in the arm-chair.

Was the alleged reason for the surgeon's absense merely a pretext to lull suspicion while he went out to fetch a constable?—did the medical practitioner intend to consign him back again to the grasp of justice?—should he have to mount the scaffold a second time? Oh! the thoughts were agonising—excruciating; and every instant they acquired a deeper and stronger hold upon the miserable wretch's mind, enfeebled and attenuated as it was by the terrible phase through which his existence had just passed.

It never struck him, in the horrified disorder of that train of reflections which swept across his fevered imagination, that Thurston had no need to resort to subterfuge if he were playing a treacherous part; but that he might have alarmed the house, or have easily bound the resuscitated criminal in his chair until an officer was summoned. No—nothing of all this presented itself to Ramsey's contemplation. His thoughts were in a state of horrible whirlwind: his brain was a delirium.

He must fly—Oh! he must fly from this house of an enemy—from this abode of a man who was about to deliver him up to justice: he must fly—he must fly!

Such were his frantic thoughts;—and despair suddenly nerved him with the strength to execute his purpose. Rising from his seat, he staggered forward a

few paces: then he clung to the mantel for support. Again he endeavoured to walk—and this time his step was firmer. He reached the table, on which he leant to steady himself. The decanter of brandy was there; and he poured a quantity down his throat. It seemed: to circulate throughout his entire system: he felt that his cheeks were flushing—that his heart was palpitating more quickly—that his legs grew stronger under him. Glancing around, he recognised the door leading from the dissecting-room: then he beheld that by which Thurston had quitted the surgery;—and it consequently struck him that he would try the third. Advancing towards it, he saw a cloak and a hat hanging upon pegs. These articles of apparel he instantly appropriated to his own use; and, still maddened by the excruciating idea that the surgeon was playing him false, he passed into the yard—entered the mews—and thence gained the street.

The fresh air of the night invigorated him: but still he walked languidly—like a man who goes out for the first time on foot after a long and dangerous illness.

Not being well acquainted with London, he knew not where he was; and his thoughts were still too much confused—or rather so harrowed by the horrible fears which had impelled him to quit the surgeon's house—that he paused not to consider whither he should go or what he should do. He reflected not that he was penniless—destitute,—worse, ten thousand times worse than the grovelling beggar in the street: for the meanest mendicant dared show his face in public;—but he—this man fresh from the gibbet—this living proof of the executioner's unskilfulness—this resuscitated "subject" of the dissecting-room,—Oh! the blackest night was not too dark to veil his countenance—to wrap his features in its funeral pall!

But of these tremendous truths the wretched creature thought not as he dragged himself along with all the speed which he was capable of exerting. For it was not enough to have escaped from the surgeon's house: it was necessary to avoid pursuit. Such was now the idea that dominated his mind;—and over-taxing his feeble powers, he soon found that he was exhausted—soon felt that he was sinking.

He was now in a vast Square; and even at the late hour, lights were visi-

ble through the rich draperies of many windows. Strains of delicious music—the piano and the harp—poured forth their melody in sweet cadences, accompanied by soft voice in harmonious modulation. Roseate, warm, and tender were the scenes of luxury within the mansions where pleasure thus prevailed: chill was the atmosphere without, as the wretched wanderer sate down on a door-step to recruit his shattered energies.

By this time the whirl of his giddy brain was yielding to the presence of graver and more collected thoughts; and he began to perceive how mad—how foolish—how imprudent he had been to quit the surgeon's abode. His late suspicions with regard to that individual now appeared so ridiculous—so monstrously absurd—that he hated and loathed himself for having given way to them.

What was to be done? All the utter friendlessness of his position—all the misery upon which he had rushed headlong by abandoning that hospitable roof—all the perils which he was encountering face to face, passed like a hideous phantasmagorian train before his eyes. The cooler his imagination grew, the stronger was the hold that dismay, perplexity, and horror took upon him. At length, after several minutes' fearful meditation, he suddenly resolved to retrace his steps to the medical man's abode.

Inspired by this idea, he raised himself painfully from the cold stones, and advanced languidly half round the square, endeavouring to recognise the street by which he had entered it. Vain attempt! So fevered was his imagination when proceeding thither, that he had taken no note of any particular buildings which might now serve him as landmarks;—and, in total bewilderment, he sank down again at the door of a vast mansion.

Exhausted—spirit-broken—reduced to despair, the wretched being fruitlessly essayed to struggle against the death-like sensations which came over him: the crushing feelings were stronger than his powers of resistance—and he fell back in a deep swoon.

A few minutes afterwards, a splendid equipage dashed up to the front of the dwelling. Down leapt the two tall footmen from behind the door of the vehicle was opened—the steps were lowered—and the Earl of Desborough, immediately alighting, assisted his charming Countess to descend.

One of the footmen had already discovered Ramsey lying upon the steps.

"The gentleman is not dead, my lord—only in a faint," said the servant, in reply to a hasty question which the Earl put.

"Then, by all means, convey him into the house and have him properly cared for," exclaimed the nobleman; while some one hastens to fetch our physician."

"He is recovering, my lord—slightly recovering," observed the footman, who, assisted by the other domestic, had raised Ramsey from the cold pavement. "With due deference, I do not think he will require the doctor.

"I am glad of it for his sake—poor gentleman?" said Lord Desborough.

"He is evidently a respectable person—and quite a young man too," added the Earl, as the moonbeams now fell on Ramsey's countenance. "Hasten and lift him into the house." This command was immediately obeyed; and the resuscitated convict was borne to a chamber in the lordly mansion.

The Earl, having wished an affectionate good night to his beautiful Countess, who repaired to her own apartment, followed the domestics to the room whither they had carried the unhappy man. Spirits, essences, and other restoratives were speedily procured: but even before they were applied, Ramsey had recovered sufficient consciousness to enable him to perceive that he was in a handsome chamber and experiencing friendly treatment. Fortunately, his presence of mind so far accompanied the returning reason as to inspire him with a lively sense of the imperious necessity of maintaining an iron control over himself, as an inadvertent word would engender the most dangerous suspicions; and suddenly remembering *that there must be an ominous mark about his neck*—the fatal sign of the halter—he shuddered as he thought of the awful risk of discovery which he had run.

But it luckily happened that the footman had deposited him in a large easy chair before they even unfastened the collar of the cloak which he wore; and, as the candles were placed on a high mantel, his neck though now exposed, was in the shade.

Raising his eyes, and encountering the benevolent looks of the Earl of Desborough, Ramsey murmured some

few broken and indistinct words expressive of thanks for the generous treatment which he had received.

"I deserve no gratitude for performing a simple Christian duty," answered the nobleman. "As the countess of Desborough and myself were returning home from a party, you were discovered in a deep swoon on the steps of our front door; and common humanity dictated the rest. I hope that you already feel much better.

"Oh! much better, thank God!" exclaimed Ramsey; then, having understood from the Earl's observations who it was that had thus generously succoured him, he added, "My lord, it is more than a mere act of common humanity as the world goes—But to-morrow, I will explain—"

"Do not attempt a syllable of explanation for the present!" interrupted the nobleman. "Are you sufficiently recovered to be left alone?—or will you have my own valet to assist you to undress and retire to repose?"

"I am sufficiently recovered, my lord—"

"Then good night to you sir," said the Earl, in a kind tone: and, anxious to escape from any farther expression of thanks on the part of his guest, he quitted the apartment, followed by the two footmen.

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE RESUSCITATED.

When Ramsey awoke at a late hour in the morning, he was some time before he could so far collect his thoughts as to remember all that had occurred during the past night.

He found himself lying in a sumptuous bed: and, on putting aside the curtains, he perceived that he was in a spacious and elegant chamber, fitted up with every attention to the most luxurious comfort.

No longer by sluggish degrees—but with whirlwind rapidity—the whole train of truths swept in unto his startled soul;—and remembering that the accursed mark must be upon his neck—a mark which perhaps would linger there for many days to come—he hurriedly raised his hand to the collar of his shirt. It was just as he had disposed it on retiring to rest; and moreover, he recollected that he had

fastened the door in order to prevent any one from entering the room and observing him while he slept.

Tranquillised by a conviction of security at least for the present, the resuscitated criminal was enabled to reflect with calmness upon his position.

He was in a house where he had received and was still enjoying the most generous hospitality: but it would be necessary to volunteer some explanation regarding himself. A tale must be invented—a name must be assumed. These were not difficult matters with one who had grown so injured to duplicity and deception as Ramsey; and in a very short time he had a plausible history ready to narrate when occasion should demand.

The time-piece upon the mantel showed him that it was eleven o'clock; and the light of day streaming through the window-curtains made him aware that it was the forenoon.

Rising from his bed, he unlocked the door; having done which, he retired to his couch again. For he not only felt weak and feeble still—but it likewise suited his purpose to represent himself to be so much exhausted as to afford an apology for remaining at the Earl of Desborough's mansion at least until night-fall. Nevertheless, it was equally requisite, on the other hand, that he should not appear so unwell as to induce the Earl to send for a medical man; inasmuch as some accident might reveal the fatal mark on his neck to the keen eye of professional experience.

Shortly after eleven, some one knocked at the door and Ramsey invited the person to enter. A footman made his appearance, with the compliments of the Earl, who was anxious to know how his guest had slept and how he felt.

"Present my most grateful thanks to your noble master," said the resuscitated, "and inform him that I am considerably better; but that, with his lordship's permission, I will repose myself for a few hours longer."

The domestic bowed and retired; and shortly afterwards another servant entered the room, bearing a massive silver tray, on which were spread the materials for a luxurious breakfast.

When again left alone, Ramsey did justice to the meal; and he shuddered as he reflected that the last time food had passed his lips was within an hour

of the fatal eight o'clock when he had ascended the steps leading the scaffold!

Shortly after he had finished his breakfast, the resuscitated received a visit from the Earl of Desborough, who shook him kindly by the hand, and expressed the joy which he experienced on finding him in so improved a condition. For the nobleman had perceived at the first glance by Ramsey's air and demeanour that he was a gentleman—an impression which was speedily afterwards confirmed by the few words which had fallen from his lips when he was conveyed to that chamber as already detailed. The Earl therefore treated him with a suitable courtesy; and, taking a chair near the bed-side, he said, "I beg that you will make my house your home until your full and complete recovery; and if you wish to communicate with your friends, my servants are at your disposal."

Now was the time for Ramsey to narrate his already well-concocted history.

"In again expressing my deep gratitude to your lordship," he said, "for the kindness I have experienced at your hands, I feel, bound to inform you who I am, and under what circumstances I became reduced to the deplorable condition in which your lordship found me last night—or rather, at an early hour this morning. My name is Gustavus Wakefield—and my father was a West India planter, residing in Jamaica. I am an only son, and was brought up in all the indolence which characterises the existence of the wealthy in that clime. Ten months ago my father died, leaving his affairs in a most distracted state—so that when all his liabilities were duly and honourably settled, I found myself penniless. Happy, however, in having rescued the memory of a beloved parent from the stigma which would have attached itself to his name had his debts continued unliquidated, I embarked six weeks ago for England, in the hope that a good education, unexceptionable letters of introduction, and a resolution to do justice to any situation which I might be fortunate enough to procure, would enable me to vanquish an adverse fate and fortune and gain my bread. Yesterday morning I set foot for the first time in the British metropolis; and I resolved to devote one day viewing the different attractions of this mighty city ere I delivered my letters and sought for

employment. Having therefore procured a lodging in a house which I considered to be respectable, I left my small portmanteau there and sallied forth to render myself better acquainted with London. In the evening I returned to my lodging, exhausted with many hours' rambling; and sleep soon visited my eyes. But I was presently awakened by the most terrific screaming, fighting, and quarrelling; and hastily dressing myself, I rushed down stairs to protect the females who were being ill-treated. The door of a room stood open; and in that apartment I beheld an orgie of so disgusting a nature as to convince me in a moment that I had been cruelly deceived in respect to the character of the house. Interference with the brawlers I perceived to be useless; but I resolved not to remain another moment in a place whose very atmosphere was contamination. I therefore hurried up stairs—threw my portmanteau over my shoulder—and abruptly quitted the abode of infamy, although I had paid a week's rent in advance. Under the impression that I should find some tavern open, where I could take up my quarters, I hastened along—threading street after street—but observing that all the houses were closed. At length I grew so wearied that I was compelled to sit down and rest myself. Two respectable-looking men—at least so far as I could judge of them by the uncertain moonlight—accosted me; and I ingenuously told them all that had happened. They expressed their commiseration, and offered to conduct me to a decent tavern where I could obtain a bed for the rest of the night. Cordially thanking them for their proposal, I hesitated not to follow them. One of the men, noticing that I was much exhausted, insisted on carrying my portmanteau; and though I felt ashamed to give him so much trouble, I was compelled to yield to what appeared his generous solicitude. We walked on for some little distance, and at length entered a large Square. The man who had the portmanteau was a few paces in advance: his friend was by my side. All on a sudden this latter villain threw himself upon me—flung me violently upon the steps leading to a house door—and rifled me of my purse and pocket-book. The resistance I made was feeble and ineffectual; for I was nearly stunned by the maltreatment I had received.

Nevertheless, I *did* struggle with the ruffian to the utmost of my ability; but having succeeded in robbing me, he dashed me back again with such savage ferocity on the stones that I remember nothing more until I was aroused to consciousness beneath your lordship's roof."

Ramsey ceased; and with so much apparent frankness had he told his story, that the Earl of Desborough was completely deceived by it.

"It is a narrative the concluding incidents of which are unfortunately of no rare occurrence," said the nobleman. "Villanies of that class are more common than good deeds in this metropolis, Mr. Wakefield."

"But the laws—the magistrates—the constables, my lord," exclaimed Ramsey, with a well feigned simplicity, "will procure me the restoration of my property."

"There is not the least chance of recovering it," replied the Earl.

"My God! what will become of me?" ejaculated the hypocrite, clasping his hands together. "All that I possessed in the world was contained in the portmanteau and the purse; and in the pocket-book were the letters of introduction which I had brought with me from Jamaica!" he added, assuming a tone of deep despondency.

"Tranquillise yourself, Mr. Wakefield," said the nobleman: "you shall not leave this house penniless or friendless. I am not disposed to do things by halves: and your history—your manner—your language, all convince me that you are a deserving person. The honourable way in which you impoverished yourself to pay your father's debts, must enlist the sympathies of every humane heart in your favour; the precipitation with which you fled from a disreputable house led to the results which actually seem a punishment inflicted on virtue. But it may perhaps prove fortunate for you in the long run that you should have thus bitterly commenced your experience of London life: for the unpleasant adventure of last night has thrown you in my way—and I will not desert you."

It was easy for Ramsey to weep tears of joy—easy to express his thanks with an appearance of the most grateful ardour; and the generous, unsuspecting, kind hearted nobleman was thereby confirmed in the good

opinion which he had already entertained of his guest.

"You shall pass a few days beneath this roof Mr. Wakefield," he said: "and in the interval we will talk over the different plans that I may suggest for your contemplation. I shall then be better able to judge of your views—your capacities—your inclinations; and my purse and interest shall alike be placed at your disposal."

"Ah! my lord," exclaimed Ramsey, "such goodness is indeed unprecedented. But I will not intrude many hours longer upon your lordship's hospitality. Naturally of retired habits—loving seclusion—and little acquainted with the monners and customs of English life, I should only render myself ridiculous by my awkwardness, which would likewise humiliate me and increase my embarrassment."

"At all events, Mr. Wakefield, the Countess and myself dine alone to-day," said the Earl; and you will favour us with your company, if you be well enough to rise from your couch towards the evening. That you shall remain in this house until I can settle some plan for your benefit. I am determined: but whether you will keep your own room or join us at our table, shall be left to your discretion."

Having thus spoken, the Earl of Desborough took a temporary leave of the fictitious Mr. Wakefield, and repaired to the apartment of the Countess to recite to her ladyship all that their guest had told him.

An hour later the nobleman's valet entered Ramsey's room with a change of linen and other necessities of the toilette; and soon after the domestic had retired, the criminal rose from his couch.

Fortunately he possessed a good suit of clothes—the very same in which he had appeared upon the scaffold: and he was therefore enabled to attire himself in a becoming manner. A natural sentiment of vanity prompted him to devote considerable attention to his toilette; and the paleness which lingered on his cheeks gave him an interesting expression of countenance.

It was about five o' clock when his toilette was thus completed; and soon afterwards the Earl came to conduct him to the drawing-room, where he was introduced to Lady Desborough.

The Countess, as credulous as her husband in respect to the tale which Ramsey had so skilfully invented,

received him with more courtesy—or rather, in a more frank and friendly manner than she would have evinced towards an utter stranger under ordinary circumstances; and, believing that her guest was totally unaccustomed to European habits, she endeavoured to place him at his ease, and divest him of all feelings of painful restraint. A well-bred woman, when amiable likewise, can speedily accomplish this; moreover, Ramsey's first semblance of embarrassment was thrown off with such artful gradiencey, that Eleanor was enabled to flatter herself on having succeeded "in drawing him out" and making him feel himself at home.

In the story which he related to the Earl, he had fixed upon Jamaica as his birth-place and as the scene of his residence until within the last ten months, because he had read much concerning that island. He had relatives there; and from them had he been in the habit of receiving frequent letters, which, in amicable communicativeness, were wont to give long and detailed particulars of the manners, customs and modes of life that signalled the planters. He was therefore enabled to converse with readiness and fluency on those subjects; and his observations were made with an appearance of all that inartificial ease which denotes the eye-witness of the things related.

His voice was particularly agreeable—his language excellent; and there was a melancholy in his tone, his manner, and his countenance which rivetted the interest of those who already compassionated the misfortunes which they believed him to have experienced.

Besides, he was handsome—very handsome;—and Eleanor could not help thinking so as she conversed with him. Indeed, she had not been two hours in his society ere she caught herself reflecting that he was one of the most agreeable men she had ever encountered in her life.

Oh! had some invisible spirit whispered in her ear that those features had been convulsed in the agonies of strangulation by the accursed halter of the hangman—that fierce spasmodic writhings had passed through that slender, symmetrical, and elegant form, as it quivered between the black beam above and the yawning drop beneath—and that the fascinating Gustavus Wakefield was none other than Philip Ramsey, the

resuscitated convict,—Oh! how speedily would the smiles have fled from her charming cheeks—how loathingly she would have recoiled even though it were but the hem of the garment touching the clothes of the wretch—how full of unutterable horror would her soul have been at the mere thought of having met him face to face!

This shows, then, how strong is the force of imagination—how powerful is the influence of a prejudice. For now—behold Lady Desborough leaning upon the arm of Ramsey as he escorts her to the dining-room;—and she is already something more than contented with her companion—she is well pleased with him!

The dinner passed away;—and, after Eleanor had withdrawn, the Earl and Ramsey sat conversing upon various topics for a short time. But as the latter dared not indulge in deep potations, his head being still weak and his frame nervous—and as the nobleman was habitually temperate,—they speedily rejoined the Countess in the drawing-room. There coffee was served; and the discourse was continued until a little after eleven, when Ramsey rose—bade his noble host and hostess, good night—and withdrew to his own chamber.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE DEVIL'S PUNCH BOWL.

ON the road from London to Portsmouth, and at no great distance from Petersfield, there is a deep valley or rather precipitate hollow, having no outlet between any of the circumjacent heights: so that it might be filled to the very brim with water. The country in the immediate neighbourhood was particularly wild and dismal at the time of which we are writing; and it is a gloomy and sinister-looking spot even at the present day.

The main road winds round a portion of the circumference of the vast hollow; and a stone on that side of the route which is next to the valley, marks the place where a horrible murder was committed many years ago upon the person of a sailor, whose corpse was thrown over the low embankment into the abyss. The assassins were discovered—condemned to death—and executed on the theatre of their crime. There they hung in chains for a long time—their blackened

corpses scaring the lonely traveller, and the creaking of their irons sounding horribly in the ears of the passengers by chaise or coach.

From days immemorial the valley of which we are speaking has been known as the Devil's Punch-Bowl.

But we must give some more explicit idea of the place as it was in the year 1793, whereof our tale at present treats.

All around, the sides of this immense hollow were escarped and precipitate—the ruggedness of the surface being concealed by thick furze, brambles, and rank grass. The road was narrow—separated only from the abyss by a small bank, scarcely two feet in height so that a tipsy man or a wayfarer ignorant of the precise features of the locality, might easily fall over, on a dark night, into the yawning profundity. Over the other side of the road frowned a portion of the hill out of which the route itself had been cut, and which rose in some places to a height of twenty or thirty feet. Not a human habitation was within a couple of miles of the Devil's Punch-Bowl in those days; lonely, sombre, and ravine-like, even in the day time its aspect inspired gloomy thoughts in the breast of the most daring traveller and as the stage-coaches wound their way about the semi-circumference which the road occupied—as if passing along the rim of a tremendous basin—the voices of the passengers would be suddenly hushed and they would look forth from the windows of the vehicles, with a kind of superstitious awe, into the depth or far across the yawning abyss into which the steeds, if they took fright, might plunge the whole equipage.

Yes—with superstitious awe, we say because many, and often fearful, were the tales which were told of deeds of violence committed in that place,—robberies and murders—rapes upon poor benighted female wanderers—and infanticides perpetrated by unmarried mothers who would travel thither from distances even of many miles in order to dispose of the living evidences of their shame. There were histories of terrible accidents told, too concerning the Devil's Punch-Bowl,—how coaches had been precipitated into the abyss—how poor pedlars, ignorant of the gulf that lay beyond the low embankment, had stepped over it in the depth of night, with the idea of snatching a few hours' repose

in a fresh green field, and had thus fallen into the eternal sleep of death—and how horses had stumbled and gone down with their riders to the bottom of the infernal pit!

Many, and varied, and horrible, therefore, were the legends belonging to the Devil's Punch-Bowl;—and superstition had not failed to lend its aid in order to enhance the terrors of the place. In the deep midnight, it was said, strange and spectral forms were seen hovering on the brink of the abyss, or moving about in its vast depths,—shapes so grim and hideous that they would exist ever after in the memories of those who beheld them, as vividly as if impressed with red-hot searing iron on the brain,—terrible apparitions, to gaze on which only for a single instant were to unnerve the bravest man until the last moment of his existence. Nor was this all. For the same superstition which propagated those tales, likewise declared that once in every year—on a certain day—or rather, at deep midnight—the Enemy of Mankind himself and all his crew held their infernal orgies at that place. Then—while the moon veiled herself with the murky clouds and the stars sank shudderingly behind the sable pall of darkness—while the wind moaned, and the owl hooted, and the furze rustled ominously—and while the wings of the bat whirled through the intense darkness,—then, in the midst of one of the long, long nights of winter, would Satan and his fiends assemble round the hollow to enjoy their hellish revel. And it was said that, when the Arch Demon waved his mighty wand, a spring of pitchy blackness would issue forth from the bottom of the ravine; and higher—and higher—and higher would swell the sable tide, till it reached the brim,—so that the denizens of Satans's Kingdom, thus gathered there in awful congress, might quaff deep draughts of the infernal nectar, whose taste was of human blood! Nay, more—so minutely had superstition elaborated all the grim details of the tremendous orgie, that it forgot not to declare how the cups whence the fiends drank were made of dead men's skulls—how the revellers danced frantically round and round their vast punch-bowl, uttering hideous cries and shouts of maniac laughter—and how the whole terrible phantasmagoria disappeared suddenly melting into thin air, the moment

the cock crew at the first glimmering of dawn.

But taking all these tales and legends for what they are worth, the huge hollow which we have attempted to describe was in sooth a sinister-looking, murderous, cut-throat place.

It was on the fourth evening after the incidents related in the previous chapter that the Magsman muffled up in his great rough coat, and grasping his club, began to clamber down the steep sides of Devil's Punch-Bowl.

The clock of the nearest village had struck nine as he passed it some twenty minutes previously; the sky was heavy with dark clouds, which were however broken sufficiently to allow the moon to send her beams faintly forth;—and the wind was rustling amidst the furze to which the Magsman clung as he lowered himself into the yawning abyss.

Soon afterwards another individual, who had approached the hollow from a different direction, began to descend into it: then, in less than ten minutes, a third—a fourth—a fifth—and a sixth,—all coming from separate quarters and at short intervals,—hurried downward to the same point.

At last the whole six met at the bottom of the abyss; and six greater villains had assuredly never assembled before in so appropriate a spot, or in any place with so suitable a name.

The first, as already stated was Joe the Magsman: then there were Miles the Buzgloak, Dick the Trumper, and the Kinchin-Grand;—and the party was made up by two other men of an equally desperate character.

"Well, here we are punctual, according to the appointment made the night before last in London," said Warren, throwing himself upon the ground, the others following his example. "To tell you the truth, I'm rather tired—after my day's walk. Twenty-five miles I've done since breakfast this morning."

"But you ain't too tired to act though," observed Dick the Trumper.

"I should rather think not indeed," returned the Magsman. "There's something I'm about to pour down my throat that would enable me to face and fight the devil himself."

"Ah! that's brandy you mean," exclaimed the Kinchin-Grand. "So much the better. I've got my flask filled to. Does anybody want some?"

It appeared that each individual was

equally well furnished; and so the offer was declined.

"Now do you know exactly, old feller," demanded Miles the Buzgloak of the Magsman, "at what o'clock we may expect the jarvey to pass along the road?"

"Why, at about twelve, I should say—certainly not sooner," was the reply.

"Yes—but how do you judge?" demanded the Kinchin-Grand. "Because we know nothing at all about it."

"You've just the same means of judging, as I have," returned the Magsman savagely.

"And how's that?"

"Why—by knowing at what o'clock the jarvey was to leave London this morning, to be sure. Take that time first of all—next you know how many miles the Punch-Bowl is from town—and then you may reckon that the rattle-trap jogs on at about six miles an hour: well—that shows you that we may expect it between twelve and one."

"Quite right, Mr. Warren," said the Kinchin-Grand. "And so we have time to smoke our pipes and rest ourselves a bit. Well—that's a comfort for we've all walked pretty decently yesterday and to-day—specially each one taking a different direction, though all coming at last to the same point."

"Ah! the Government, little thinks what kind of chaps its people will have to deal with, to-night," observed Dick the Trumper. "There can't be a suspicion of what's going to take place: 'cos there's only eight in the secret—and six on us is here."

"Eight!" ejaculated the Kinchin-Grand. "Who's the other two?"

"Why, the Gallows' Widow and Carrotty Poll to be sure," replied the Trumper.

"Oh! ah! I forgot the women," said the Kinchin-Grand, lighting his pipe. "By the bye, Mr. Warren, you talked just now about fighting Old Nick: do you know that they say he has his boozings here once in every year—and a precious set out it is too, by all accounts."

"Why! I'm blowed if you don't half believe it!" exclaimed the Magsman, who was likewise puffing a short clay filled with very strong tobacco.

"No—I'll be hanged if I do," answered the Kinchin-Grand: "or else I wouldn't be here to-night. What I

undertakes, I likes to go through with; and as I shouldn't go through with this here affair if I was afeared, I shouldn't have undertook it in that case. But I say, are we all armed as agreed upon the night afore last?"

"A pair o' pistols and a stout club for each individual?" added Miles the Buzgloak.

The responses were satisfactory on this head and the men continued to chatter, smoke, and drink until the Magsman's watch, being consulted by means of placing the glowing bowl of his pipe near the dial so as to throw the light upon it informed the company that it was verging rapidly upon twelve.

"Now, then, my lads," exclaimed Joe Warren; "we must prepare for action. Put away your pipes—take another swill at the bingo flask—and follow me."

The night, as it deepened, had grown more gloomy and menacing: but still the storm with which the clouds seemed laded, burst not forth—and still from between the black masses piled one above another on the face of heaven, the straggling rays of the moon peeped timidly forth. The wind had risen to a somewhat higher key—and the air was intensely cold: but the ruffians, heated as they were with brandy and excited by the object which they had in view, felt not its chilling influence. Silently they now pursued their way, the Magsman acting as captain and as guide; and as those six forms moved from the bottom of the Punch-Bowl towards the acclivity on the summit of which the main road ran, they appeared to be fiends of darkness in the faint and uncertain light of the moon.

On gaining the top, or brim, of the vast hollow, the party was divided into two sections. Miles the Buzgloak, Dick the Trumper, and the Kinchin-Grand were ordered by the Magsman to conceal themselves amidst the furze which the low embankment overlooked; while Joe Warren himself, accompanied by the two men completing the band, crossed the road and ascended the portion of the hill which commanded the route.

Being thus disposed of, the ruffians lay in wait patiently and silently.

At length, the rumbling of wheels and the noise of horses' hoofs met their ears. They all listened attentively: the sounds came from that quarter whence they were expected;

and there could be no doubt that this was the vehicle whose presence was the object of night's adventure.

In a few moments two lights, glancing like meteors, began to emerge as it were from the obscurity; and the progress of the carriage along the road on the brim of the Punch-Bowl was thus marked by its lanterns.

On came the vehicle: and now it was near enough for the ruffians who lay in ambush, to observe that it was a long hearse-like concern, drawn by four horses, and with the driver seated on a high box in front.

An escort of four dragoons guarded the ponderous machine—two riding on one side, and two on the other.

In this manner the cavalcade was jogging along, when, all on a sudden, the Magsman leapt from the overhanging hill upon the roof of the vehicle; and, hurling the driver from his seat into the middle of the road, he sprang upon the back of one of the wheel-horses, and cut all the traces in a moment.

At the same instant that the Magsman thus took the initiative, his two companions threw themselves from the overhanging eminence upon the couple of dragoons who rode on that side of the vehicle: while the two mounted soldiers riding on the other side were as suddenly assailed by the Buzgloak, the Trumper, and the Kinchin-Grand.

Shots were fired—and a severe conflict took place.

Away sped the four horses which the Magsman had freed from the vehicle: frightened by the report of the pistols, they galloped along the road, their thundering hoofs raising every echo in that vast abyss the brim of which the terrified animals were thus madly skirting.

But all that we have as yet described was the work of scarcely a minute; and the proceedings of the Magsman were executed with wondrous rapidity.

Having cut the traces and thus rendered the vehicle stationary by emancipating the horses, this desperate individual passed like lightning underneath the ponderous machine; and with one blow of his club he knocked off a massive padlock which fastened a door at the back of the huge hearse-like carriage.

The vehicle instantaneously vomited forth its contents in the shape of a dozen convicts, heavily ironed; and

amidst the very foremost the Magsman had the satisfaction of recognising, by the flickering moon-light, the countenances of his friends Briggs and the Big Beggarman.

Meantime the four dragoons and the five villains opposed to them had maintained a desperate struggle on either side of the vehicle: but the release of the convicts decided the fortune of the fray in a very few moments. The soldiers were made prisoners without any loss of life; and they, as well as the driver of the van, were bound securely with strong cords and deposited, powerless, beneath the overhanging hill.

Then, in the sheer spirit of wanton mischief, the whole gang of desperadoes—liberators as well as convicts—seized upon the carriage—wheeled it to the edge of the Punch-Bowl—and hurled it over the low embankment into the abyss.

Down—down thundered the ponderous machine, rolling over and over with rapid concussions that sounded like the sharp and successive reports of a brisk cannonade: down—down it went, tearing away furze, brambles, and rank grass,—and ultimately dashing to pieces at the bottom of the Punch-Bowl.

Satisfied with the work of destruction, and tauntingly wishing the four dragoons and the driver a good night, the party hastened away from the scene of this exploit; and having gained a neighbouring wood, the Magsman produced a quantity of files and pick-locks from one of his capacious pockets. By means of these implements the convicts soon removed their fetters; and we need hardly observe that great was their joy at this triumphant and unexpected deliverance—for not even the Beggarman and Briggs had been previously aware of their friends' determination to attempt their rescue.

CHAPTER LXIX.

PAULINE AND GABRIEL.

It was eleven o'clock on Sunday morning; and Pauline Clarendon was seated alone in a small parlour at the house which her father had taken about five weeks previously in Caven-dish Square.

The young lady was dressed in an elegant but unassuming style; and the dark colour of her gown set off to the utmost advantage her pure and stainless complexion. Her deep brown hair, so rich with its natural gloss, showered in a myriad ringlets over her well-shaped shoulders; and her neck, grandly white and gently arching, resembled a polished ivory pillar against that flood of luxuriant curls which swept her back.

Upon her countenance a soft melancholy rested and, although the light of heaven appeared to illumine the depths of her eloquent blue eyes, yet her features expressed a certain pensiveness which imparted to her entire appearance an ineffably charming air of reflective sweetness.

From the reverie into which the lovely girl had fallen, she was presently aroused by a double knock at the front door; and starting from her seat, she threw a glance at the mirror over the mantel-piece. A smile of satisfaction played for a moment upon her lips—for the faithful glass, reflecting her beauteous countenance, told her that she was charming: then ashamed at the feeling of vanity to which she had thus yielded for an instant, she returned to her chair—her features at the same time assuming a somewhat severe expression.

But, oh! for Pauline to wear an angry look was not an easy task: it was merely Venus attiring herself in the armour of Minerva;—and though she might fix upon her brow the helmet of the Goddess of War, yet beneath the shade of the vizor those were still the eyes of the Goddess of Love and Beauty which looked forth!

The door opened—and Lord Florimel was announced.

Pauline rose, and proffered him her hand: but when he made a movement to convey it to his lips, she immediately withdrew it—and, indicating a chair, bade him be seated.

"In the first place I thank you, Pauline, for granting me this interview—at last," he said, in a tone of soft remonstrance.

"I declined to accompany my father and sister to church, on purpose that I might see you alone," said Pauline. "But I scarcely know why we should have met at all—since we must part presently to encounter each other no more save upon terms of mere acquaintanceship."

"And yet it is hard that I should be

condemned for a crime of which I am totally innocent," observed Florimel, with a voice and manner expressive of vexation. "As God is my judge——"

"Add not perjury to your other offences, Gabriel," interrupted Pauline. "And now give me your attention. That I have loved you well—fondly—sincerely," she continued in a tremulous tone, "you are aware: but I am not so weak and silly a girl as to espouse a man whose infidelities will render me wretched. I appreciate all the honour which you—a great nobleman—did me at the time by the offer of your hand; and your conduct was the more generous, inasmuch as I was then in a far humbler situation than at present. Had you remained faithful to me, Gabriel," she proceeded, the pearly tears now trickling down her beauteous cheeks "I should have esteemed myself the happiest woman in the world; and, on becoming your wife, my whole and sole care would have been to convince you that I was worthy of your affection. I do not say that I should have given you a love greater than any which human heart ever knew before: but certainly it would have been outvalued by no devotion of which woman is capable. Bright and glorious, Gabriel, were the fairy scenes of happiness which my imagination had woven; and in that wild and romantic castle-building my soul was steeped in a fount of indescribable bliss. But gone are those visions—vanished are those sweet dreams; and all is a dreary waste where the gorgeous structures raised by my fervent fancy so lately stood. We shall part—but on my side it will be in sorrow, and not with anger. I give you back your vows and pledges—I release you from all your solemn promises—in the same way that you must emancipate me from mine."

And, as Pauline uttered these last words, she averted her countenance to hide the tear that were now streaming down it.

"My God! are things so serious as this?" exclaimed Florimel, cruelly tortured. "I have listened to you, my beloved Pauline—not with patience—but in respectful silence, and now I implore you to give an attentive ear to me in my turn. Interrupt me not, therefore, when I take God to witness that you have wronged me with your suspicions—that, although circumstances were against me and appearances unfavourable——"

"Oh! if I could only be convinced of the truth of this assertion!" ejaculated Pauline, looking up and smiling through her tears.

It was Venus laying aside the martial sternness of Minerva, and becoming the Goddess of Love and Beauty once again!

"Yes—I *can* convince you—I *will* convince you!" said the young nobleman; and, taking a letter from his pocket, he handed it to Pauline, saying, "The girl whom you encountered as she issued from my house, was the bearer of that missive!"

Miss Clarendon cast her eyes over the billet, and read the contents as follow:—

"What think you, my dear friend, of the bearer of this? You are a naughty man for not coming to see me. Pray explain this absence of several days—not by letter, but in person. I shall expect you to sup with me on any evening you may choose to appoint: and if it be agreeable to you. I can promise that the bearer, Miss Camilla Morton, shall be of the party. All that you need now say to her is that you will attend to the note."

"Ah! Florimel, I have indeed wronged you!" exclaimed Pauline, throwing herself into his arms, and weeping upon his bosom. "I now perceive that the young woman was a stranger to you—that she was sent by some vile person to tempt you—But wherefore did you not give me this explanation at first?" she demanded, the thought suddenly striking her: and, withdrawing her arms from about his neck, she gazed anxiously—almost searchingly—upon his countenance.

"Will you not at once banish this unpleasant incident from your mind, dearest Pauline—without asking me for any farther explanations?" said Florimel, his voice and manner alike denoting that he was now troubled and embarrassed.

"If you love me, Gabriel," she answered, in a tone of mild reproach, "you will completely and fully relieve my mind from any disagreeable impressions which remain upon it. Once more, then, do I ask you why you did not at once forward me this note, to convince me that the young person whom I encountered was a stranger, and not a familiar acquaintance?"

"Pauline, I will be candid with you," returned the nobleman, taking a seat upon a sofa and compelling her to place herself by his side: "I was afraid you would recognise the handwriting in that note."

"I never saw it before," said Pauline, snatching up the billet from the table where she had flung it, and studying it with attention.

"So much the better," exclaimed Florimel. "And now ask me nothing more, I beseech you."

"This mystery distracts me!" cried the young lady. "If you have done naught of which you are ashamed, why shroud a portion of the incident in so suspicious a secrecy? Tell me everything, I conjure you! And first, wherefore should you have fancied that I might recognise the handwriting?"

"Because I feared—I dreaded—that is, I thought it probable that the person who penned this note might have had occasion at some time to write to your sister," said Florimel, cruelly embarrassed.

"Write to my sister!" ejaculated Pauline, in amazement. "Surely you cannot fancy that so vile a woman as the authoress of this letter must be, could hold any correspondence with Octavia? O Gabriel! It is not because my sister has shown every proof of confidence towards him whom she loves—it is not because she is already his wife in the eyes of heaven, though not in the estimation of the world, that you should think so injuriously of her!"

"No—no—I was mistaken—I was wrong!" cried Florimel. "And now let us change the discourse, my beloved Pauline—"

"We cannot abandon the topic in its present state," said Miss Clarendon, firmly. "Who is the woman that wrote this letter and whom you suspected to be in communication with Octavia?"

"I dare not—must not—" stammered Florimel, with increasing embarrassment.

"Oh! a light breaks in upon me!" suddenly ejaculated Pauline. "It is at the house of Mrs. Brace, the milliner, that Octavia meets her lover—and you are in Mrs. Brace's confidence—you told Octavia so when you accompanied her home on that memorable morning—Yes—everything confirms my suspicions—and it is this same Mrs. Brace who is the vile authoress of that most vile letter! My God! what will become of poor Octavia? She is deceived—I can read it all—"

And covering her face with her hands, Pauline wept bitterly.

"What have I done?—what mischief have I made?" cried Florimel,

starting from his seat, and beginning to pace to and fro in an agitated manner.

"To set myself right with you, Pauline, I have engendered the most terrible suspicions in your mind——"

"It was my fault, Gabriel—dear Gabriel!" she exclaimed, springing towards him and throwing her arms about his neck. "Yes—it was my fault," she continued, in a voice broken with deep sobs: "I compelled you to speak out—I extracted the truth from you—and I appreciate all the delicacy which prompted you to remain silent—Oh! my poor Octavia—I fear that you are deceived—betrayed—lost—undone: for no honourable man could place the woman whom he intends to make his wife in contact with a wretch so vile as this Mrs. Brace?"

And Pauline sank, convulsed with grief, upon the sofa.

"Tranquillise yourself, my beloved—in the name of God! tranquillise yourself," said Florimel, adopting his most soothing tone: "All may not be so bad as you fancy—Octavia's intended husband may not be acquainted with the real character of this Mrs. Brace—And remember, dearest, that amongst men the milliner's private avocation is not looked upon——"

"Do not advance anything in extenuation of the wicked woman," interrupted Pauline, with impassioned tone and manner. "I will forget that you ever knew her—that you ever made her services available to your own purposes; for that such has been the case, is too evident, Gabriel—Nevertheless, all that shall be forgotten, I say, if you will now lend me your assistance on behalf of my poor deluded sister. And remember, dear Gabriel," continued the sweet girl in a tone of earnest entreaty,—"remember that when you become my husband, Octavia is thereby made *your* sister also—and as a brother you must be jealous of her honour. To her father—her natural protector—all this unhappy business cannot be made known: but as you are already well acquainted with every detail—indeed, as it was from your own lips that I received the first hint respecting Octavia's love and the connexion which she had formed so hastily—it is for *you* to unravel the whole and ascertain who this Mr. Harley really is."

"Mr. Harley!—is that the name?" inquired Florimel, who now heard it

for the first time; and at the same instant he recollected having been informed by Mrs. Brace that Octavia's lover was a man of rank and shortly to be married, but that he had not the slightest intention of espousing the elder Miss Clarendon.

"Yes—his name is Harley," repeated Pauline. "But I will show you a portrait which bears the most striking resemblance to him—for I myself have seen this Mr. Harley, and I can vouch for the marvellous accuracy of the likeness."

Thus speaking, the young lady wiped away her tears; and opening a portfolio which lay upon the table, she displayed to the view of the astounded Lord Florimel the portrait of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales.

For nearly a minute the young nobleman gazed in speechless wonderment upon the print: but at length raising his eyes, and turning them slowly towards Pauline, he was shocked to perceive that her countenance was ghastly pale—that her looks were wild and haggard—and that the colour had even fled from those lips which, naturally of such a delicious coral were now almost as white as the pearls beneath.

"My God! what is the matter?" exclaimed Florimel, extending his arms towards her;—and she sank, suddenly convulsed with sobs, upon his bosom.

He seated himself on a chair—he took her upon his knees—he strained her passionately in a fond embrace—he kissed away the tears that now rained down her cheeks, to which the excitement of bitter anguish brought back a crimson glow.

"Sweetest—dearest Pauline," he murmured in her ears,—"tranquillise yourself, I implore you! Never—never did I love you so ardently—so sincerely—so devotedly, as at this moment. My God! tell me what I can do for you, angelic girl: but dry those tears—subdue these rending sobs, I conjure—I entreat you! Yes—I will behave as a brother towards Octavia—because it now rests with yourself when I shall demand *your* hand of Mr. Clarendon and lead you to the altar. As your husband, Pauline, I shall acquire the right to vindicate the honour of Octavia;—and you have only to breathe your commands, in order to see them executed!"

"Gabriel, your words console me—and these generous assurances which they convey render me as proud of you as I was already fond," said Pauline, of her own accord approaching her lips to his own and returning the fervent kisses which he imprinted thereon: then, gently disengaging herself from his embrace, and taking a seat by his side, —but placing one of her fair hands in familiar and artless confidence upon his shoulder,—she observed, while passing her handkerchief across her eyes, "You have now seen the portrait of Octavia's lover; and if Mr. Harley be not the Prince of Wales himself, then, never was resemblance more wonderful."

"I am astonished—bewildered!" exclaimed Florimel, really uncertain to what opinion he should fix his belief. "But there are strange likenesses in the world," he said, in a musing tone; "and that recent trial of which Sir Richard Stamford appeared as a prosecutor or a witness—"

"I have thought of the same incident," observed Pauline; "and sometimes I have fancied that Octavia's lover may be the Prince—at others that he is this very Sir Richard Stamford—and then again that he is the Mr. Harley whom he represents himself—But you, Gabriel," she exclaimed, suddenly interrupting herself, and speaking with animation, "will clear up this mystery!"

"Give me your commands, my beloved—and I will execute them," said Florimel, who, in the enthusiasm of the adoration which he now experienced towards the charming Pauline, was prepared to go through fire and water to serve her.

"I must tell you, Gabriel," she resumed, fixing upon him a look of the tenderest gratitude, "that Octavia is herself oppressed with serious misgivings on the point which we are discussing. She strives to conceal them, poor girl—she buoys herself up with hope to the extent of her powers; and she does not dare trust her tongue to reveal all her doubts, and fears, and suspicions to me. But, alas! I can read the nature of her thoughts—and I know that there are times when she is unhappy—very unhappy. For her sake, Gabriel, must we at once devise the means to clear up the mystery which surrounds Mr. Harley—"

"Frankly—candidly—unreservedly do I now tell you, my beloved," interrupted the young noble man, "that I

do not believe this Mr. Harley is the person he represents himself to be. You place such implicit reliance upon me, that I should be unworthy of your love and your confidence if I did not manifest the same ingenuousness towards you. So noble is your nature, that you compel me to view duplicity and deceit with abhorrence; and I declare most solemnly that I will henceforth yield to that benign influence which your own character sheds upon me."

"Gabriel, I adore you!" exclaimed Pauline, throwing herself once more into his arms and embracing him affectionately.

"However wild your past life may have been—however deeply you have plunged into pleasure and dissipation—your conduct of this morning is an atonement for it all! Yes—I adore you, Gabriel: for now, you are worthy of that immense love which I devote and dedicate to you—and to you alone!"

"And may my right hand wither, Pauline, when I deceive you!" cried the impassioned Gabriel, as he covered her blushing countenance with kisses.

"We understand each other better now than ever," whispered the amiable girl; "and if the sincerest affection which woman's heart can pour forth be capable of ensuring man's felicity, then that affection is yours and that happiness is within your reach."

"Oh! what sacred power—what holy influence does a virtuous woman possess over the heart of the sterner sex!" exclaimed Florimel, with the most unfeigned enthusiasm. "Henceforth I abjure all those pursuits which once gave me pleasure, but on which I now look with ineffable disgust: and for the future my Pauline's bright example shall be my guiding star. Yes—lovely, angelic being—I am thine—wholly and solely thine; and there shall not exist a secret between us."

"Were it not on account of my poor sister, I should be the happiest woman on the face of the earth," said the beautiful girl, as she resumed her place by her lover's side. "But, alas!" she added, in a different tone and with overclouding countenance,—"you ere now gave utterance towards which have almost confirmed my previous suspicion that Octavia is ruined—lost—betrayed irremediably! Tell me,

Gabriel—tell me—do you know aught of this Mr. Harley?”

“Listen to me, my angel—and prepare to hear evil intelligence,” said the young nobleman, taking one of her fair hands and pressing it between both his own. “I know this much—that Mr. Harley is a man of rank and that so far from entertaining honourable intentions towards your sister, he is engaged to be married to another.”

“He is a man of rank,” murmured Pauline, in a faint tone: “and that rank——”

“Has never been revealed to me,” was the prompt reply.

“I shall no longer give way to grief,” said the young lady, her countenance suddenly assuming a determined expression, although still retaining all the feminine sweetness that was natural to it. “You and I, Gabriel, must now work in Octavia’s interest, but unknown to her”—then, after a moment’s reflection, she rose—fetched a newspaper from an adjoining room—and, returning to her seat, observed, as she pointed to a paragraph in one of the columns of the print, “This journal of yesterday announces that his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales will give a grand entertainment to-morrow evening.”

“To which I have received an invitation, through the interest of her Grace the Duchess of Devonshire, who is my cousin,” said Florimel. “I have never yet had the honour of being presented to the heir-apparent; and it was therefore my intention to avail myself of the opportunity of visiting Carlton House to-morrow evening.”

“And I shall accompany you, Gabriel,” returned Pauline, in a decided tone.

“Would that I had the power to make you my companion!” exclaimed the young nobleman. “I should indeed be proud of you, my angel: and when you are Lady Florimel, the doors of Carlton House will be open to you. But the etiquette of those princely saloons is so rigid—so strict—so exclusive——”

“I will obtain an invitation,” said Pauline. “Do you not think that Lord Marchmont can accomplish this much for me? If so, my cousin, the Hon. Arthur Eaton will prevail upon his father to interest himself in my behalf.”

“I fear that you will be disappointed in that quarter, dearest,” answered

Florimel. “Lord Marchmont is a Tory—and the Tories, you must know, have not the slightest influence at Carlton House. But—a thought strikes me! Come with me to Devonshire House—I have the *entree* even at this early hour—and I will introduce you to the Duchess as my intended bride. Her Grace will perhaps undertake to *chaperon* you to-morrow evening.”

“A thousand thanks dear Gabriel! In five minutes I shall be ready to accompany you.”

And thus speaking, the beautiful girl tripped lightly from the room.

CHAPTER LXX.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

THE church-clocks were striking twelve as Lord Florimel handed Miss Pauline Clarendon into his carriage which was waiting at the door; and he ordered the coachman to drive to Devonshire House, Piccadilly.

Away started the splendid equipage; and the young nobleman felt proud and happy in having so charming and amiable a companion. On her side, Pauline was so profoundly touched by the frank and candid behaviour of her lover during the conversation which had so recently passed between them, that her happiness would have been complete, had not the position of her sister become so serious a cause of affliction.

In due time the carriage stopped in front of Devonshire House; and the hall-porter, who answered the summons given by one of Lord Florimel’s footmen, said that her Grace was at home.

The young nobleman assisted Pauline to alight; and they were conducted up a magnificent staircase, into a small but elegantly furnished room, where the Duchess of Devonshire, attired in a graceful *dishabillee*, was half reclining on a sofa placed so that she might catch the warmth of the cheerful fire which blazed on the hearth.

Florimel was a great favourite with the Duchess; and she received him with all the cordial familiarity of a relative. In a becoming manner and suitable terms he presented Miss Pauline Clarendon, with the delicate intimation that she was shortly to become Lady Florimel; and the Duchess, taking the young maiden’s

hand, addressed her with so much affability and graceful courtesy that she was instantly relieved of any embarrassment she had at first experienced on finding herself in the presence of that brilliant leader of the fashionable world.

"It is very amiable of your Grace to receive us at this unseasonable hour," said Florimel: "and an apology is necessary on my part——"

"Not at all, Gabriel," interrupted the Duchess. "You are always welcome—and doubly so this morning, inasmuch as you have brought so interesting a companion. But in the same friendly and unceremonious manner that I now receive you both, must I inform you that I have only a quarter of an hour to devote to you on this occasion: for at one o'clock her Royal Highness the Princess Sophia and the Countess of Desborough will be here."

"We will not intrude many minutes upon you, my charming and amiable cousin," said Florimel. "In fact, I have a little favour to ask you——"

"If you mean that I must be present on a certain day," exclaimed the Duchess, with a smile of enchanting archness, "and that I must keep myself disengaged for a particular ceremony, rest assured that I shall 'experience great pleasure in accepting the invitation. I hope you intend to make my volatile cousin quite steady, Miss Clarendon?'"

"I assuredly hope that the hint contained in the words of your Grace will not be thrown away upon his lordship," answered Pauline, smiling: "and I may add that I have the fullest and most implicit confidence in him."

"You will make a very interesting pair—and I long to see you both standing at the altar," said the Duchess. "Indeed, you and I, Miss Clarendon, must become very good friends. In the course of the ensuing week I shall be receiving company; and I shall expect the pleasure of numbering yourself and sister amongst my guests."

"Then your Grace is aware that Miss Pauline has an elder sister?" observed Florimel.

"Mr. Eaton called upon me yesterday," responded the Duchess; and was enthusiastic in describing and praising his two charming cousins. You therefore perceive, Miss Clarendon, that I was prepossessed in your

favour before I experienced the pleasure of knowing you.

"The kindness with which your Grace has received me, will never be forgotten," observed Pauline. "But I am fearful that our visit has already been prolonged——"

And she glanced significantly towards Lord Florimel.

"I will at once explain the favour which I have to solicit at your hands, dear cousin," said the young nobleman addressing the Duchess. "It was not precisely to ask your Grace to honour our bridal-day with your presence: although we should not have omitted that invitation—and now we consider your Grace pledged to accept it. But my Pauline is very anxious to attend the Prince's ball to-morrow evening——"

"And nothing would have afforded me greater pleasure than to introduce her," interrupted the Duchess: "but it is unfortunately impossible—inasmuch as the ball is preceded by a dinner-party, to which I am honoured with an invitation. On the next occasion, however, Miss Clarendon may hold me engaged to act the agreeable part of *chaperon*."

Pauline was about to express her thanks for this promise so affably and rapidly given, when the door was thrown open—and a footman announced her Royal Highness the Princess Sophia and the Countess of Desborough.

But what pen can describe the amazement—what language can convey an idea of the astonishment of Pauline Clarendon, when in these ladies she recognised the *Mrs. Mordaunt* and the *Mrs. Smith* whom she had encountered on an occasion well remembered by the reader.

The Princess Sophia did not immediately notice the young lady—because she was at once accosted by the Duchess of Devonshire, who hastened to conduct her to a seat: but Eleanor instantaneously beheld and recognised Pauline—and, though for one moment completely astounded, yet in the next she recovered her presence of mind, and, with admirable tact, approached her, saying, "My dear Miss Clarendon, I am rejoiced to meet you again. I hope that my friend Octavia is as well as your own appearance proves *you* to be?"

Pauline murmured a few scarcely intelligible words in reply: for the sense of amazement had taken so

strong a hold upon her that she could not immediately shake it off. But she felt the Countess press with an unmistakable significance the hand which her ladyship had taken in her own : and raising her eyes, Pauline threw upon her a look which, though rapid, conveyed the assurance that *"the secret was safe with her."*

"I am delighted that we have thus met, Miss Clarendon," continued Eleanor, repeating the young lady's name louder than before, so that it might reach the Princess and make her Royal Highness aware who was present.

And as that name struck the ears of the frail daughter of George the Third she gave so sudden a start and turned so ashy pale, that the Duchess of Devonshire exclaimed, "Good heavens! your Royal Highness is unwell!"

At these words Lord Florimel sprang towards the bell-pull to summon assistance but the Princess, instantaneously recovering her presence of mind by one of those almost superhuman efforts of which we mortals are sometimes capable in pressing emergencies, stopped the young nobleman with her own hand—saying, "It is nothing—a sudden indisposition seized upon me; but it has passed."

"Are you sure that you feel better, my dearest friend?" inquired the Countess of Desborough, hastily accosting the Princess Sophia. "Oh! I am well aware that your Royal Highness is subject to these sudden and evanescent attacks——"

"Thank you for your kind solicitude, my dear Eleanor," said the Princess; "I can assure you that the faintness—the giddiness—which seized upon me, has totally passed."

And, as she uttered these words, she darted a significant look upon the Countess, to imply that her presence of mind was completely restored.

Eleanor now returned to Pauline, who was standing at a little distance;—and, taking the young lady's hand, she said in a low and rapid whisper, "You must be presented as if you had never seen the Princess before":—then, leading her towards Sophia she exclaimed, "Permit me to introduce to your Royal Highness a much esteemed and amiable friend of mine—Miss Pauline Clarendon."

"Every friend of yours, Eleanor, is welcome to me," said the Princess Sophia, receiving Pauline with a more than ordinary condescension and

graceful affability: although the colour came and went in rapid transitions upon the cheeks of the very handsome but frail and dishonoured daughter of George the Third.

Lord Florimel was likewise presented to the Princess, and then to the Countess, with whom he was previously unacquainted—the Duchess of Devonshire performing this ceremony for her noble cousin; and the conversation turned upon the grand entertainment which the Prince of Wales was to give on the following evening.

"I am glad this subject has been mentioned," observed the Duchess of Devonshire, who, in spite of her levity, was excessively good-natured, and who had taken a great fancy to Pauline: "because," she continued, "Miss Clarendon is anxious to be present at his Royal Highness's ball—and I am unable to introduce her, inasmuch as I am honoured by an invitation to dine with his Royal Highness and Mrs. Fitzherbert. But you, my dear Eleanor," she added turning towards the Countess of Desborough, "will perhaps take charge of our young friend, who, I may observe is shortly to become Lady Florimel."

"I should be delighted to present Miss Clarendon to his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales," said the Countess: "but circumstances, I fear, will prevent me from accepting the invitation with which I have been honoured."

"Indeed, my dear Eleanor," exclaimed the Princess Sophia, "you must overrule any circumstances which threaten to keep you away from my royal brother's entertainment to-morrow evening. I shall be there—and it will prove a great disappointment to me if I do not meet you on this occasion at Carlton House. I shall even consider it unkind towards myself if you remain absent."

"And I, too," said the Duchess of Devonshire, "shall be grieved if I do not meet you to-morrow evening, Eleanor. You must positively renounce any other engagement which you may have formed."

It was with no small degree of difficulty that the countess of Desborough concealed her vexation at being thus pressed: for, as the reader may easily conceive, she had her own private motives for not wishing to attend the heir-apparent's ball, nor indeed even to come in contact with his Royal Highness again. The conversation

which she had overheard between him and the Magsman had filled her with loathing, indignation and aversion for that princely voluptuary, and any tenderness of feeling which she might at one moment have experienced towards him, had been changed by a deeper reading of his character into abhorrence and disgust.

But the Princess Sophia—not suspecting that her friend had any private motive of dislike with regard to the Prince of Wales, and anxious by any means to conciliate and please the young lady who was the depositress of her own tremendous secret—continued to urge the point relative to the invitation to Carlton House, with a zeal and earnestness which amounted almost to a command and rendered a refusal impossible.

“Yes, my dear Eleanor, you must go—and Miss Clarendon will then be enabled to accompany you,” said the Princess. “Were it not inconsistent with the prevailing etiquette, I would myself introduce Miss Clarendon.”

And as she uttered these words, the Princess Sophia threw a look full of deep meaning upon Pauline—as much as to say, “Keep my secret faithfully—and I will prove your friend in all things.”

The result of so much pressing on the part of her Royal Highness and the Duchess of Devonshire, was that Eleanor was compelled to yield;—and, in thus yielding, she was also under the necessity of offering to act as *chaperon* for Miss Pauline Clarendon on the occasion. It was consequently arranged that Pauline should repair to Desborough House in Berkeley Square at nine o'clock on the following evening, and thence accompany the Countess to the palatial residence of the Prince of Wales.

This matter being settled, to the great delight of the young lady, she and Florimel took their leave.

When they were once more alone together in the carriage, and as they were whirling back to Cavendish Square, Florimel said, “And now, my beloved Pauline, you have gained your point most effectually; and to-morrow evening I shall have the pleasure of dancing with you at Carlton House. But what excuse will you make to your father and sister for having accompanied me in my carriage this morning?—and upon what pretext will you be enabled to leave the house

in ball-room costume to-morrow evening?”

“My dear Gabriel,” replied Pauline, “when we reach Cavendish Square presently, you must demand a private interview with my father, and inform him that you have honoured me by a proposal, and that you have been referred to him. Will you do this.

“I am rejoiced that I have received your permission to take this step,” answered the young nobleman, pressing her hand tenderly. “Mr. Clarendon will not then think it strange that you should have consented to take a drive—round the park shall we say?—in my carriage.”

“When he sees that your intentions are honourable, my Gabriel,” responded Pauline, “he will not allude to the circumstance. With regard to the affair of to-morrow evening, my father fortunately dines out—and I shall not be at a loss to invent some excuse to satisfy Octavia. Indeed, I will tell her that I am to accompany you to the Opera—and you must call for me in your carriage at twenty minutes to nine. You can then put me down at Desborough House in Berkeley Square.”

“All this shall be attended to, my beloved,” said Florimel.

“And now, Gabriel,” resumed the young maiden, gazing tenderly upon him,—“you must not imagine that because I am so ready in divising the means to lull my sister’s suspicions asleep to-morrow evening, and mislead her as to the real place and object of my visit,—you must not imagine, I say, that duplicity is no stranger to me—”

“I would not wrong you thus grossly!” exclaimed Florimel, in an impassioned tone. “I know you to be innocence itself—I am aware of the motives which prompt you to visit Carlton House to-morrow evening—and your sisterly feelings render you all the more estimable in my eyes. Your conduct, my Pauline, on the first occasion of our acquaintance, has taught me to admire—love and respect you,” he added, again pressing the hand which he retained in his own.

“And your conduct of this day, Gabriel, has endeared you to me more than I can explain,” murmured the beautiful creature, fixing upon him a look full of unutterable feelings.

“It is sweet to be praised by your lips!” exclaimed Florimel, returning

that look with one of adoration. "But I must congratulate you, Pauline, on the readiness with which your appearance and manners engage the esteem and friendship of those with whom you come in contact. The Duchess of Devonshire took an immediate fancy to you: the Countess of Desborough greeted you as kindly as if you were her sister;—and the Princess Sophia pleaded most eloquently in your behalf respecting the presentation at the heir-apparent's ball to-morrow night."

Pauline had no time to respond to these observations: for at the moment her lover had done speaking, the carriage stopped in Cavendish Square.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE FAIR PATRICIAN AND THE RESUSCITATED.

It was about four o'clock on that Sunday afternoon when the Countess of Desborough returned to her residence in Berkeley Square.

The incidents of the morning had annoyed her; and there was a certain pouting expression upon her coral lips, which, instead of impairing the effect of her loveliness, gave an indescribable charm to her classically chiselled features.

Retiring at once to her own chamber, and dismissing her female attendants the instant they had assisted her to lay aside her bonnet and scarf, she threw herself into an arm-chair and gave way to her reflections.

"To-morrow evening I shall be doomed to meet that despicable voluptuary face to face!"—thus ran the current of her thoughts. "Oh! how my blood boils at the idea of having permitted him to bestow his lustful kisses on my cheeks—my lips! How maddened with rage do I feel at the recollection of that weakness which induced me to assent to admit him to my chamber! But thank God! I escaped his polluted embrace;—and the amour which his infamous pander and assistant, the milliner of Pall Mall, was sent hither to forward and promote, was interrupted at the very moment when he stood upon the threshold of success, and I on that of shame and degradation. And now—to think that I must appear to-morrow evening

in the presence of this man—treat him with the respect due to his princely rank—and receive any courtesy which he may choose to demonstrate towards me! But even *this* I could endure—and I should not be so deeply vexed and troubled now on that account alone. Alas! I foresee that my beloved friend, the Princess Sophia, stands upon an abyss. Her honour is in the keeping of two young ladies—And yet neither Octavia nor Pauline would betray her! No—no they are good and amiable girls—they will keep her secret. Her secret, indeed! Does not her royal brother know it?—and is he not aware that the child was born at the very house occupied at the time by these young ladies? And one of them is to be presented to him to-morrow night! Poor Sophia! were she aware that her secret was thus known to her eldest brother—the brother of whom she stands most in awe—she would die with grief. My soul is filled with gloomy presentiments. Wherefore should Pauline Clarendon be thus anxious to appear at Carlton House? Is it through that curiosity which influences giddy girls?—is it to gratify a mere sentiment of vanity?—or has she a still less worthy motive in view? No—no: she is a good girl, I repeat; and it is natural enough that she should desire to mingle in that bright sphere of fashion to the confines of which she has only been so very lately raised.

Such were the conflicting thoughts and anxieties which swept through the imagination of the Countess of Desborough in the solitude of her own chamber. But her reflections gradually flowed into another channel;—and a voluptuous langour came gradually upon her,—like the softly stealing influence of a dreamy repose in an atmosphere oppressive with mingled sultriness and perfume,—as she murmured the name of *Gustavus Wakefield!*

Then, rising from her seat, she contemplated herself in the full-length mirror which stood near; and as she surveyed her own magnificent form, which was so faithfully reflected on that polished surface, a smile of mingled triumph and joy appeared upon her lips—and then, in another moment, her bosom heaved to the profound sigh that came as it were from the very depths of her soul.

But the influence of her warm and impassioned nature was now upon her;—and, yielding to the irresistible sway

(of feelings which she could not control, she proceeded to the drawing-room with the secret hope of finding Ramsey there—*alone*!

Nor was she disappointed: for the instant she made her appearance, the resuscitated rose from the sofa on which he had been reclining.

This was the sixth day of his sojourn at Desborough House, over the threshold of which he had not once stirred during that interval. Nor had he encountered any of the visitors who happened to call; for, pleading a continued indisposition and likewise a disinclination to mingle in society, he had been permitted to enjoy as complete a seclusion as if he were the master of the mansion and able to act as he chose. His breakfast was served in his chamber: at mid-day he was wont to repair to the drawing-room, in which the Earl sometimes and the Countess very frequently bore him company;—and with them he had dined every evening since his arrival at the house. With Lord Desborough he was already a great favourite, and in Eleanor's eyes he was the handsomest and most agreeable individual of her acquaintance.

That he was by no means displeasing to the Countess, Ramsey had not failed to observe;—and his profound knowledge of human nature soon convinced him that she was a woman of strong passions. He had likewise perceived that Eleanor and her husband did not occupy the same sleeping apartment—that, in fact, there was a certain mysterious estrangement between them, resulting from no apparent fault on either side. Vainly did he rack his imagination to conjecture the cause; the circumstance set all his ingenuity at naught:—and the only hypothesis which seemed feasible, was that Eleanor had been unfaithful to her husband—that he had so far forgiven her as to conceal her frailty from the world—but that he could no longer make her the partner of his bed.

And yet when inclining to this belief, Ramsey was staggered by the fact that Eleanor's deportment towards her husband was not that of a woman conscious of her secret shame: nor was the Earl's behaviour towards her that of a man who had any reason to complain of his wife. On the contrary, he was most tender, affectionate, and devoted with regard to his beautiful Countess; whereas her conduct was

somewhat capricious and versatile—at one time reciprocating his love, and at another being characterised by a coldness which she evidently tried to subdue, but could not.

When he reflected upon these circumstances, he could not in any way reconcile them with the supposition he had formed to account for the fact of the Earl and Countess sleeping in separate apartments; and yet in no other manner was he able to find a reason for this singular mode of life which they led. It was strange—most strange, that a man in the prime of his years and a lovely woman of ardent temperament and glowing passions should practise a self-denial as mysterious as it was unnatural.

But we have observed that Ramsey had perceived that he himself was not displeasing to the Countess; and, unmindful of the generous hospitality which he had received and was still receiving at the hands of the Earl of Desborough,—forgetful of his duty towards the nobleman who had promised to become his friend and patron and who, with the most admirable philanthropy, had undertaken to provide for him in future,—the treacherous guest had already resolved upon the seduction of Eleanor!

With these few observations, we resume the thread of our narrative.

The heart of the Countess of Desborough was beating rapidly, and a rich carnation glow appeared beneath the transparent olive of her cheeks, as she entered the drawing-room where, as she had hoped and anticipated, she found Ramsey alone.

And he failed not to observe that heightening colour and the trepidation of her manner as she advanced across the spacious apartment—her rich dress sweeping the thick carpet on which her elastic steps scarcely left a visible impression.

"Your ladyship took advantage of a day unusually fine at this season of the year," observed Ramsey, as he made a low and graceful bow on accosting the Countess.

"My beloved friend the Princess Sophia sent yesterday to command me to wait upon her at a somewhat early hour in the forenoon to-day," responded Eleanor; "and we paid a visit to the Duchess of Devonshire. But how happens it, Mr. Wakefield, that you have not also availed yourself of this glorious sunshine to breathe the fresh air? A little exercise would

have benefitted you after your severe indisposition."

"I feel no inclination to cross the threshold of your ladyship's hospitable mansion," said Ramsey;—"until I leave it altogether," added, with a half-stilled sigh.

"But you are in no hurry to leave us, Mr. Wakefield; exclaimed the Countess, with involuntary warmth!" and instantaneously perceiving that she had spoken in such a tone, she became scarlet with confusion and embarrassment. "I mean," she accordingly hastened to add, "that until you are perfectly recovered, it is quite unnecessary for you to seek another abode."

"Did I consult my own feelings alone, I should not indeed be precipitate in leaving this friendly home which I—so providentially found," observed Ramsey, throwing a certain degree of mournful tenderness into his voice: "but, under circumstances, the sooner I depart——"

And, stopping short, he affected to be seized with a confusion as complete as that which Eleanor had ere now experienced in such reality.

"Has anything occurred to displease you, Mr. Wakefield?" she inquired. "It is the wish of the Earl and of myself that you should receive all possible attention; and if you have sustained any annoyance—any slight—any neglect——"

"My God! I have been treated too well—too kindly," interrupted Ramsey with enthusiasm; "and my heart abounds in feelings of the most fervent gratitude towards your noble husband and yourself."

"Then wherefore hint so mysteriously that circumstances will compel you to depart soon, Mr. Wakefield?" asked the Countess, in a voice that trembled somewhat, and with a strange fluttering of the heart.

"Did I indeed make such an observation? Then I was wrong—very wrong," exclaimed Ramsey, speaking as if vexed with himself. "But in order that your ladyship may not interrupt my inconsiderate words to the prejudice of the domestics of this establishment, permit me to assure you that I have received every possible attention at their hands. The circumstances to which I alluded——"

"Are perhaps connected with your position in this country?" said Eleanor. "I am acquainted with your history—the Earl has made it known

to me in all its details—and I can understand, Mr. Wakefield, how painful it must be for one nurtured in ease and comfort, and looking upon himself as the heir to a large fortune, to awake from that dream and find adversity instead of prosperity staring him in the face. Such has indeed been your lot: but you must not look upon the future with apprehension and distrust. The Earl of Desborough has proffered you his friendship; and he is a man of warm heart and generous feelings. But not until you are completely restored to health, will he begin to talk to you seriously upon the course of life which may best suit your inclinations, and on which he will assist you to enter. In the interval it is his desire that you should make this house your home; and it would grieve him were he to hear you speak of any circumstances prompting you to depart abruptly."

"Again do I assure your ladyship," said Ramsey, in a soft and low voice, "that if I consulted my own inclinations only, I should not dream of quitting this hospitable mansion. But—pardon me—forgive me," he exclaimed, his tone suddenly becoming impassioned and his manner excited,—“my happiness is compromised—even if it be not already wrecked beyond redemption—Oh! would to God that I had never set foot in this metropolis—that I had never left my native Jamaica to seek my fortune on the British soil!"

And, averting his head, he appeared to be profoundly affected.

"Mr. Wakefield, I am grieved to observe that you are unhappy," said Eleanor, her heart palpitating more rapidly than ever, and a singular sensation coming over her as if some mystic influence associated herself and her own feelings with the passionate emotions which Ramsey displayed. "I speak to you more frankly than I should to any other friend or acquaintance, because you are a guest in this house—because you are a stranger in this country—and because your misfortunes have neither been few nor light. And therefore do I repeat that I am grieved to behold these proofs of unhappiness on your part—and I fear that some secret sorrow is oppressing you. If this conjecture be correct—and if it should lie in the Earl of Desborough's power to remove the cause——"

"Every word that your ladyship

utters is aggravating my misery," exclaimed Ramsey, casting upon her a look full of tenderness: then, instantly withdrawing his eyes, he said, "I implore you to suffer me to leave this house before my feelings hurry me into expressions which you would receive with indignation, and which would leave me no alternative than suicide in the despair that I should experience of having given utterance to them."

And, as he thus spoke, he sprang from his seat and rushed towards the door.

"Mr. Wakefield—stop—I, conjure you!" cried Eleanor, also starting from her chair. "This conduct on your part will appear so strange—so unaccountable—Besides," she added hastily, "it is scarcely kind of you to fly from us as if we were your enemies instead of your friends."

"You command me to remain—and I obey you, beauteous lady!" said Ramsey, turning back and advancing slowly towards the spot where the Countess, trembling all over with indescribable emotions, was supporting herself by holding to the mantel-piece. "Yes—I obey you in this, as I am ready to obey you in all things—oven with the sacrifice of my life! But, remember," he added, suddenly sinking his voice to a low whisper,—"remember that when in your presence, I am not master of myself."

"What do you mean?—I am bewildered—confused," murmured Eleanor, sinking back into her chair—while her glowing cheeks, her heaving bosom, and her melting eyes bore evident to the soft and voluptuous feelings which filled her heart.

"You ask me what I mean," said Ramsey, placing himself near her, and fixing upon her a burning, impassioned look which she returned for a moment—a single moment; and then her eyes were cast downward, while deeper grew the blush upon her splendid countenance, and more agitated were the heavings of her breast:—"you ask me what I mean," he repeated, after an instant's pause: "I will tell you! A strange series of adventures rendered me an inmate of your mansion! The generous hospitality which I have received beneath this roof has naturally led me to regard your noble husband as the best of men—yourself as the most estimable of women. Thus far, then, am I devoted to you: I could fall down and worship you both as the

kindest friends that God ever gave to man. But, alas! towards yourself, beauteous lady, this sentiment of profound gratitude has deepened into a feeling which I never knew before—a feeling which strangely combines the most exquisite bliss with the acutest anguish—the dreams of heaven with the pains of hell! For I behold you beautiful—Oh! so beautiful that you appear to me a vision of the fancy's creation, and not a being of earth: and I listen to your voice, which flows like delicious music upon my ears—and I gaze on your countenance, when you observe me not, until I feel as if I could throw myself on my knees before you and entreat that I may become your slave—your humblest menial, in order that I may demonstrate my devotion. Yes—dear lady, all this I experience towards you:—and yet I know that it is a crime to harbour such sentiments. But, my God! as well might a man endeavour to roll back the torrents of Niagara or breast the rapids of the Canadian rivers, as to hope to stem the tide of such feelings as these which agitate my heart. Therefore, again do I beseech you to suffer me to depart at once—to fly from this mansion whose hospitality I have outraged with my unhappy passion—to leave a city where so bright a vision has burst upon my view to dazzle me for a moment with its supernatural lustre and then leave me wretched! Yes—I will depart—O God! I will fly —"

And again he rushed towards the door.

"Gustavus—Mr. Wakefield—this must not be!" exclaimed Eleanor. "Stay—remain—I conjure you!"

And sinking back into the chair whence she had started for a moment, the Countess covered her face with her hands, as if to close her eyes upon everything around her and look only into the depths of her own soul.

"Is it possible that you have commanded me to remain, after hearing this confession which I have dared to make?" said Ramsey, throwing as much tenderness as possible into his voice, as he once more placed himself near the Countess. You are not angry with me, then?—Oh! you are not angry with me—you will pardon my presumption—you will forgive my boldness—and perhaps you will pity me, dear lady!" he added, bending his head down close to her own.

"Oh! I am at a loss how to answer

you," murmured Eleanor withdrawing her hands from her countenance and slowly raising her eyes until they met his own—when glowing, ardent, and impassioned were the looks thus exchanged. "You have surprised me—filled me with confusion," she added, in a melting tone: "but you must not think of leaving me—you must not quit the house. Friendless as you are—inexperienced in the ways of this great metropolis—"

"But it is for *your* sake, my benefactress, that I am anxious to depart hence," interrupted Ramsey, in an impassioned tone. "I cannot endure the idea of insulting you by the spectacle of that misery into which my hopeless passion will plunge me. In six days—six short days—I have learnt to love you with an enthusiasm—an adoration—a worship amounting almost to a delirium of the feelings;—and it were madness on my part to remain within the sphere of this influence which maddens while it delights me—which bathes me in ecstatic bliss, and at the same time rends my soul with the crucifixion of ineffable tortures. Wherefore, then, should I remain—"

"Because I ask you to stay—because I implore you not to leave me thus," interrupted the Countess, now so completely borne away by the torrent of her own devouring passions, that she was ready to plunge headlong into the abyss of guilty pleasure and consummate any sacrifice for the sake of that handsome young man who appeared a perfect Adonis in her eyes as he avowed the ardour of his love with so much apparent ingenuousness. "No—you must remain, Gustavus—dear Gustavus," she added, raising her eyes towards him with a look in which all the voluptuousness of her nature and all the sensuality of her temperament spoke with an unmistakable eloquence: "you must remain, I say—to love me—and to be loved in return."

Her head drooped as her sinking voice murmured these last words; but in another moment she was strained to his breast—their cheeks met in burning contact—and the yielding lady gave back the warm and luscious kisses which her lips received from his own.

"Then you love me, Eleanor—you love me?" whispered Ramsey, after a long pause.

"From the first moment that I saw

you, I experienced a profound interest in you," was the soft response; "and that feeling has rapidly gained upon me, acquiring strength the more I saw of you—the oftener I found myself in your society."

"Oh! ten thousand thanks for this assurance, my adored Eleanor!" exclaimed Ramsey, smoothing her hair of velvet blackness and softness above her high and noble forehead. "It is sweet to be beloved by you; and if any one had whispered to me an hour ago that I was so soon to enjoy this elysian happiness, I should have fancied that none but an angel from heaven could have conferred it on me. Dearest, dearest Eleanor—for the first time in my life do I experience the ineffable bliss of love—its mysterious depth—its unfathomable influence—its ecstatic sway—its voluptuous refinement;—and I thank thee—from the profundities of my soul do I thank thee, for initiating me in this empyrean felicity. My existence has kindled into a new life: I feel the consummation of all the golden dreams and brilliant hopes which my fancy has ever formed when wondering what love could be."

"And I also love for the first time," whispered Eleanor, her bosom throbbing with an indescribable rapture.

"For the first time!" exclaimed Ramsey. "Is it possible that you have never loved till now?"

"Never with the ardour—the devotion—the enthusiasm that I feel for you," she replied, her clear soft voice harmonising what that enchanting loveliness which invested her as with a halo.

"Then you love not your husband, sweet Eleanor?" said Ramsey, straining her to his breast, as she lay half reclining in his arms—her cheek resting against his own, and their hair mingling.

"No—I never loved him," she answered emphatically: "and I may perhaps some day tell you why all his attention, devotion, and generosity could never succeed in gaining my affection. Yes—that secret may I perhaps reveal to you, Gustavus," she added, a burning blush suffusing itself over her countenance, as she at the same time cast down her eyes in shame. "But there was a moment—not very long ago—when I fancied that I loved *another*; and for a few days I mistook that transitory feeling for the real, pure, and true

passion. Such however it was not: for the instant that this *other's* conduct manifested itself to me in its intense selfishness and utter profligacy, I was enabled to discard him from my heart with an ease that astonished even myself. But towards *you*, Gustavus, I experience a far different sentiment; and I know that this sentiment is love—the sincerest, tenderest love! For were you to appear before my eyes as a character less amiable and worthy than now I believe you to be, I should still love—still cling to you—still be ready and willing to follow you over the face of the earth. This, then my Gustavus, is love—and it is a love which I have never known before and shall never know again!”

“Oh! welcome, dearest Eleanor—welcome indeed to my soul is this love of thine,” said Ramsey, imprinting a thousand kisses upon her lip. “Yes—welcome this virgin love as if it were also your maiden charms which you surrender up to me—”

“Gustavus,—dear Gustavus,” whispered Eleanor, throwing her arms about his neck and embracing him with the most impassioned ardour: “the words which you have just uttered—But, no matter—I dare not tell you my secret now—”

And her lovely head rested upon his shoulder, her bosom palpitating against his breast.

“To-night, my angel,” murmured Ramsey, in a low and melting tone—for his voice was full of a rich masculine melody,—“to-night you will render me completely happy—you will grant me the privileges love,—you will receive me in your chamber—not with the coyness of the timid girl, but with all the impassioned ardour which has already made your caresses so ineffably sweet.”

The Countess whispered a reply; and Ramsey's features became radiant with joy, and triumph, and sensual passion.

“Oh! what happiness awaits me,” he continued, in that same soft murmuring tone: “and how tediously will pass the hours until the blissful moment when I shall clasp thee in my arms, confident of already standing on the threshold of paradise! No—not tediously will pass these hours—because we shall be together during the interval; and, though in the presence of your husband, we must control our feelings—restrain the ardour of our looks—and speak only in the usual

terms of a cold courtesy,—nevertheless we shall enjoy each other's society, and in the secret depths of our hearts will exist the knowledge that we love and that we shall soon be happy! And when the witching hour arrives at last my Eleanor—then in the retirement of your own chamber, and when clasped in each other's arms, you can breathe in my ear that secret to which you alluded ere now.”

“Yes—for henceforth we will have no secrets with each other,” replied the fond, impassioned woman in whose veins the hot blood circulated like lightning.

* * * * *

’Twas midnight—and Eleanor was now alone in her chamber.

The lady's-maids had just withdrawn, having assisted their mistress to lay aside her garments, and arrange her luxuriant hair for the night.

A loose wrapper enveloped her form—her naked feet were thrust into slippers,—and, half-reclining upon a sofa drawn near the fire, the Countess awaited with indescribable feelings the coming of her lover.

The wax-candles upon the mantel had been extinguished; and a small night-lamp, placed on the toilette-table joined its rays with the light of the fire to shed a soft and subdued lustre through the room. Delicious perfumes exhaled from porcelain vases standing in the window-recesses;—and the warm and fragrant atmosphere seemed to be the voluptuous breath of love itself.

How rapidly beat Eleanor's heart as she lay half-reclined upon the sofa!

A species of timidity—like that which the virgin bride feels when entering the nuptial couch—was upon her. Her colour changed fifty times in a minute,—now glowing with the richest crimson upon her cheeks—now sinking into a strange paleness: and in her eyes there was an expression of intense anxiety mingling with the fires of burning—scorching—devouring passion.

Was it that she knew she was doing wrong, but that she could not wrestle against the fury of her desires?—did she experience, at the bottom of her soul, a regret that she had gone thus far?—would she have retreated and repented even yet, if it were possible to overcome these sensual longings which consumed and devoured her?

We know not—and we have not leisure now to analyse the feelings of the Countess of Desborough: for, hark—a footstep in the passage reaches her ear—Oh! how audibly her heart beats—how tumultuously her bosom heaves!—the door opens—and Ramsey appears!

Scarcely can he restrain his impatience sufficiently to spare a moment to lock the door: another instant—and he is clasped in the arms of the Countess.

“Dearest, dearest, Eleanor!” he exclaims, as he enfolds her in his embrace.

“Dearest, dearest Gustavus!” she murmurs, straining him to her bosom.

And if hell’s flames were immediately to follow the consummation of her frailty, she would not resign these few moments of elysium to save herself from that eternity of pain.

Forgotten is her husband—forgotten is every sense of duty—forgotten is all the world beyond the four walls of that chamber of love! Oh, if she knew everything concerning her lover!—but she did not!

“Dearest, dearest Eleanor!” what rapture was there in the words for her ears!

“Dearest, dearest Gustavus!”—with what ineffable delight did she murmur the avowal of love to him who was now dearest to her of all the world!

And now Ramsey, learnt the nature of that secret which Eleanor had promised to reveal to him, and the knowledge of which instantly accounted for all that had hitherto appeared so extraordinary and mysterious between herself and her husband.

CHAPTER LXXII.

FRESH SCHEMES AND PLOTS.

Leaving the Countess of Desborough and the resuscitated to enjoy the delights of love in each other’s arms, we must go back three or four hours and request our readers to accompany us, at about half-past eight o’clock on that Sunday evening, to the dwelling of Mrs. Brace in Pall Mall.

It will be remembered that this delectable lady had invited Lord Florimel to sup with her on the Sabbath now, so particularly referred to—and she had promised that Camilla Morton should be present. Since the previous

Monday evening, when the invitation was given, Mrs. Brace had not heard from the young nobleman; and she therefore concluded that he meant to honour her with his company. Due arrangements were accordingly made for the select banquet;—and Camilla, experiencing not the remotest suspicion of Mrs. Brace’s treacherous intentions, had suffered herself to be persuaded to keep her mistress company in entertaining the noble guest. It was true that the young girl would have reality have preferred the privacy of her own chamber: but this feeling on her part was solely on account of the recent loss of her parents, and not through any misgiving with respect to the integrity of the milliner: on the contrary, in the artlessness and innocence of her soul, she had fancied that it was from motives of delicacy that Mrs. Brace had invited her, as she might have chosen any other of her young ladies to be present on an occasion when she was to receive a male guest.

The preparations for the little banquet, then, were in progress: the cook was busy in the kitchen—Mrs. Brace, elegantly dressed, was already seated in her parlour—and Camilla was arranging her toilette in her own chamber,—when, at half-past eight, a letter was delivered at the house, by one of Lord Florimel’s footmen.

Mrs. Brace opened it hurriedly, and read the following words:—

“I regret, my dear friend, to occasion you any disappointment: but it is totally impossible for me to partake of your hospitality this evening. Nor do I think it likely that I shall ever be enabled to visit you again. For I have this day succeeded in making my peace with the charming and well-beloved Pauline: nay, more—I have demanded her in marriage of her father, who at once accepted my proposal.

“Now, look you; my dear friend—understand—and be reasonable. It suits me to throw off my bad habits and to enter on a more steady career. This I am resolved to do—and nothing shall deter me from my purpose. Be so kind, then, as to throw no more temptations in my way—to send no more young ladies to my house with letters—indeed, to forget that I was ever a patron or client of yours. Your friend I will with pleasure remain—that is, to render you a service whenever I may do so with honour to

myself; but in any case, our future correspondence must be through the post. Now, do not think that I am angry with you: it is no such thing. I have not turned saint—but am merely reformed in that point of conduct which did indeed most deplorably lack amendment. I do not intend to cut you—nor yet to act ungratefully towards you; because I have received many kindnesses at your hands. But I am going to be steady—and that declaration explains everything.

"Rest assured, my dear friend, that you have no well-wisher more sincere than myself. As a proof of my good feeling I will give you a hint which may not be unserviceable: but I rely on your honour to keep the matter entirely to yourself. It is this:—*The plot in which poor Octavia Clarendon is the heroine, thickens rapidly. My beloved Pauline is not idle on behalf of her sister; and of course I cannot stay her proceedings, even if I felt inclined. In less than forty-eight hours she will have cleared up all doubts respecting the identity of Octavia's lover!*

"Again I implore you to retain these hints a profound secret, at least so far as my name is concerned. But be assured that there is a storm brewing—and you will do well to adopt some measure to screen yourself.

"FLORIMEL."

The letter fell from Mrs. Brace's hand—at the same instant the Prince of Wales was ushered into the room by Harriet.

The lady's maid retired immediately closing the door behind her; and his Royal Highness advanced towards Mrs. Brace, who had risen from her seat on his entrance. But the moment he obtained a nearer view of her countenance, he was struck by the expression of trouble and annoyance which it wore; and seizing both her hands, he exclaimed, "My dear Fanny, what, in heaven's name! is the matter?"

"Nothing—nothing—a little temporary vexation," she said, endeavouring to smile: but the attempt was very ineffectual.

"It is something more serious than you choose to admit," observed the Prince: then, his eye catching the letter which lay upon the rug he stooped down and picked it up.

"You must not read it!" exclaimed Mrs. Brace, extending her hand to receive the note.

"This is silly of you, Fanny," said

the Prince, neither giving her the document nor yet reading it. "I hold in my hand the undoubted cause of your annoyance and vexation—and you are well aware that I should not wish to become acquainted with its contents through any motive of jealousy. Such nonsense has long ceased to exist between you and me. Therefore, when I express an anxiety to read this letter, it is through pure solicitude on your behalf—"

"And an apprehension that it may probably refer to yourself," added the milliner, with a tartness which she very rarely exhibited to any one—much less to the Prince of Wales. "Well—I do not know that you had better peruse the document," she observed immediately afterwards, in a milder tone.

His Royal Highness accordingly cast his eyes over the letter;—and his countenance fell.

"By heaven! this is serious," he ejaculated, flinging himself upon a seat, while Mrs. Brace resumed her chair opposite to him. "*The plot thickens rapidly,*" he said in a musing tone, as he referred to Florimel's communication; "by God! it must thicken as much as it likes," he exclaimed abruptly, "for anything that I can do to prevent it. '*Pauline is not idle on behalf of her sister.*' This is just what I foresaw—just what I expected all along. Pauline and Florimel are two maudlin sentimentalists together; and they will work a deal of mischief. How the deuce is it, Fanny, that you did not contrive to have Pauline debauched by some gay fellow, or else to produce a separation between her and Florimel! The thing is serious: but may I be particularly damned if I know how to remedy it. *In less than forty-eight hours she'*—that's Pauline—'*will have cleared up all doubt respecting the identity of Octavia's lover.*' Forty-eight hours! When was this note written?"

"It reached me a few instants before you entered the room," answered Mrs. Brace.

"To be sure! I ought to have recollected the confusion and trouble in which you were plunged at the moment," said the Prince. "Well—forty-eight hours—that's plenty of time to adopt some decisive measure in."

"Oul you must not take the phrase in its literal sense," exclaimed the milliner. "It may mean a longer, or it may mean a shorter period: but it is used emphatically to show that the

interval will be brief ere your rank is discovered. So far, therefore, from postponing a due and serious consideration of the proper measures to be adopted, we must deliberate at once."

"If there be one thing more than another that I hate," said the Prince, speaking as if he had a nausea in his mouth, "It is the trouble of thinking on disagreeable matters."

"Possibly!" observed Mrs. Brace, with petulant dryness. "But your Royal Highness will be pleased to reflect that an exposure in this instance may compromise the very crown which you have in the perspective. A young lady of good family, seduced by the Prince of Wales under a feigned name—led to believe that his intentions were honourable and that would espouse her,—my God! such a history would create a feeling of indignation from one end of the kingdom to the other; and the people would pull down my house about my ear."

"No, my dear Fanny—we'd have a regiment of Guards stationed along Pall Mall to protect you," responded the Prince, in a jocular manner. "Thank God, we always have plenty of General-officers who like nothing better than having to open a murderous cannonade upon the people."

"This is not a time nor a subject for jesting," said Mrs. Brace. "I beseech you to look seriously at the matter—for it troubles me profoundly. You perceive that even if you were enabled to silence Octavia by means of the influence you exercise over her, her sister Pauline would still proceed—"

"And this Florimel would no doubt help her," added the Prince. By the bye, he is coming to Carlton House to-morrow night. He voted with the small Whig section in the House of Lords the other evening—and I was therefore compelled to place his name on my reception-list. I shall be very civil to him to-morrow, and thus disarm him of any rancour with which Pauline may have inspired him: for it is perfectly clear that the identity of Mr. Harley with the Prince of Wales is even more than suspected by that young lady—whereas Octavia is perhaps still full of uncertainty."

"You may conciliate Florimel, perhaps," said Mrs. Brace: "besides, you perceive by his note that he would rather hush the matter up if he could. But depend upon it, from all I have heard, Pauline Clarendon is a girl of

spirit and will leave you no peace when once she shall have established the fact of your identity. There is only one plan that I can think of—"

"Name it—name it, my dear Fanny," cried the Prince. "I knew you would end by suggesting something; you are so fertile in expedients. Besides, women always like to make matters out as bad as they can, when they mean to wind up by proposing a remedy. Now then, my dear, what is your plan?"

"Listen patiently for a few minutes," said the milliner, smiling at the compliments which the Prince paid her. "You are well acquainted with Mr. Clarendon's position. A few weeks ago he believed himself certain of succeeding to the Marchmont peerage, the Hon. Arthur Eaton being then at death's door. But this young gentleman has recovered in a most miraculous manner: and there is not the slightest chance that Mr. Clarendon will ever be Lord Marchmont. To make things still more unpleasant for Mr. Clarendon, he accepted a large income from the present Lord Marchmont, and went and took a fine house, at the time when Arthur Eaton was supposed to be dying. He is therefore totally dependant on Lord Marchmont's bounty; and at the old peer's death, he will be dependant on Arthur. Such a position is doubtless intolerable for Mr. Clarendon: and yet it is quite clear that he cannot well retreat, and go back to his cottage in the Edgeware Road and his hundred or two hundred a year."

"What on earth is all this to come to?" demanded the Prince of Wales.

"Why—that you must obtain a peerage and a pension for Mr. Clarendon, as the price of having the intrigue with his elder daughter completely hushed up," returned Mrs. Brace.

"And Pauline?" said his Royal Highness.

"Must submit to any arrangement her father chooses to make," answered the astute milliner.

"By heavens! you are the shrewdest woman I ever met in all my life," exclaimed the Prince. "But you forget that I have not the slightest influence with the Ministry to obtain a peerage and a pension for any one who is even well known—much less for a comparatively obscure individual—"

"No influence with the ministry

perhaps," interrupted Mrs. Brace: "but have you not the power of *extorting by menaces* from your royal father—"

And she fixed her fine eyes significantly upon him.

"To be sure! Hannah Lightfoot's paper—or rather the half of it!" exclaimed the Prince. "Your advice is admirable. I'll send my friend Tim Meagles to my father to negotiate the business. On Tuesday morning the matter shall be entered upon. Thanks to your counsel, Fanny, I now see my way pretty clearly out of this thicket of difficulties. And now you will permit me to inform you what it is that brought me hither this evening."

"I am all attention," said Mrs. Brace. "But you will stay and sup with me? You perceive by Florimel's note—"

"That he has disappointed you," added the Prince, with a smile. "Well—I will take his place at your table this evening. Shall we be alone?"

"If you like. But there was to have been another—"

"A young lady, I'll be bound!" ejaculated his Royal Highness.

"Precisely. She is a sweet creature—and I intended to tempt Florimel with her," said Mrs. Brace. "Her name is Camilla Morton—and as a camilla is she pure and chaste."

"By all means let her sup with us," cried the Prince. "In the meantime I will hurriedly inform you what brought me hither this evening. You are aware that to-morrow night there are grand doings at Carlton House. Invitations were of course sent amongst others, to the Earl and Countess of Desborough; and I heard just now—about an hour before I came hither—that the Countess will accept the invitation."

"I should scarcely believe it," observed Mrs. Brace.

"But I know that she *will* be present to-morrow evening," returned the Prince, emphatically. "My sister the Princess Sophia and the Duchess of Devonshire both told me so just now, in the course of conversation."

"And what do you propose to do?" inquired the milliner: "for, fertile as I may be in expedients, I have not as yet thought of any scheme to forward your views with respect to Lady Desborough."

"I believe that Mrs. Fitzherbert has sent to request your attendance upon her to-morrow evening to superintend

her toilette—has she not?" asked the Prince: and, on receiving an affirmative reply, he continued to observe, "Well—that is for the grand dinner-party at seven o'clock; and you will have to remain at Carlton House until nine or half-past in order to see that Mrs. Fitzherbert's toilette is in perfection for the ball. Is it not just as I am describing?"

"Nothing could be more accurate," responded Mrs. Brace, smiling at the minuteness of detail into which his Royal Highness was entering, and the ultimate object of which she could not by any means conjecture,

"So far, so good," resumed the Prince. "Now, you are aware that when the company arrive, they ascend the grand staircase, and the ladies pass into a toilette-chamber to lay aside their scarfs or cloaks, before they proceed to the ball-room."

"I cannot be ignorant of this fact," observed Mrs. Brace, "since I have more than once assisted Mrs. Fitzherbert's gentlewomen in that very chamber to receive the ladies' cloaks. This was, however, several years ago, when curiosity prompted me to take that post in order to obtain a good view of your lady-guests and observe the fashions which chiefly prevailed in their toilette."

"Ah! I had forgotten that you had done this," said the Prince. "Well—it is precisely the same thing that I require you to do again to-morrow evening. You will then watch for the Countess of Desborough—and the moment she makes her appearance you will hasten forward to attend upon her."

"But her ladyship will refuse my services with indignation," cried Mrs. Brace,

"Her ladyship on the contrary, will affect not to recognise you," returned the Prince. "Do you think that she would draw all eyes upon herself, by any display of feeling on such an occasion? Besides, if questioned by her friends and acquaintances relative to the cause of her anger against you, what reply could she make? Only reflect for a moment upon her position. She has accepted the invitation, partly, no doubt, for fear her husband should imagine that she had any cause of complaint against me—and partly in compliance with the wishes of the Princess Sophia, who is her very dear friend. Her behaviour will therefore be of a character to defy the least suspicion that anything,

agreeable or disagreeable, has ever taken place between herself and me."

"I comprehend the force of your reasoning," said Mrs. Brace. "I shall therefore hasten to volunteer my assistance to her ladyship the moment she enters the toilette-room——"

"And, while thus aiding her," interrupted the Prince, "you will whisper in her ear these words:—*It is of the utmost importance that I should speak to your ladyship alone, for a few minutes, presently. Your honour is threatened—your reputation is at stake. I both can and will show your ladyship how to defeat your enemies.*'—These ominous words will terrify her, and make her anxious to know more. Her curiosity will be painfully excited, especially as you are the person to utter so singular and mysterious a warning. Taking advantage of this impression which you are certain to create, you must add these words: *'At midnight precisely I shall be at the end of the passage leading from the left of the great landing which your ladyship will cross to enter the ball-rooms. If your ladyship wishes to know more, you can meet me then and there. But come alone—or I shall hurry away if I see you accompanied by any one.'*"

"And if her ladyship should keep the appointment?" said Mrs. Brace, inquiringly.

"Then you will throw open the door of the room at the end of the passage where is to meet you—and the Countess will pass on into that apartment, thinking that you are showing her into some retired place, where you may converse together without fear of interruption or observation."

"And what next?" asked the milliner.

"Why—the instant the Countess has crossed that threshold," returned the Prince,—"instead of following her, you will shut the door hastily—lock it on the outside—and take your departure. Leave all the rest to me."

"The scheme appears as clumsy in its conception as it will prove awkward in the carrying out," said Mrs. Brace.

"It may seem wild, far-fetched, and even preposterous to describe," observed his Royal Highness: "but, when managed with your tact and ingenuity it will pass off just as I anticipate. At all events, you will do your best, Fanny?"

"Most decidedly," answered the milliner,

The footman now entered the room

to lay the table for supper; and in a few minutes Camilla Morton made her appearance. The Prince of Wales was introduced to her as Mr. Harley; and he was instantaneously struck by her sweet, pensive, and touching style of beauty. The lily whiteness and rose-leaf hue which were so delicately mingled in her complexion, were set off to the greatest advantage by her mourning garb; and the dark vesture likewise enhanced the elegance and grace of that figure which, though slight, was rounded in accordance with the most perfect specimens of Grecian art.

She was somewhat surprised when, instead of meeting Lord Florimel, she was thus introduced to a Mr. Harley: but the milliner hastened to inform her that his lordship had been seized with a sudden indisposition, and that Mr. Harley, who was "a very old friend indeed," had dropped in by accident;—and as Camilla cared nothing for either the one or the other, it was perfectly indifferent to her whether she sat down to supper with Lord Florimel or Mr. Harley.

The evening passed away; and, although Camilla fancied that Mr. Harley fixed his eyes upon her somewhat intently more than once, she was nevertheless compelled to admit to herself that he was a polished gentleman, very agreeable, and endowed with great conversational powers. When she rose at eleven o'clock to retire to her own chamber, the Prince proffered his hand and endeavoured to convey her's to his lips, while Mrs. Brace was conveniently stooping—to pick up her handkerchief: but Camilla instantly snatched back her hand, while her cheeks suddenly became crimson;—and, darting on his Royal Highness a look which convinced him that he had made no impression upon her heart, however agreeable she might have thought him as a companion, the young maiden hurried from the room.

And when she had gained the solitude of her own chamber, Camilla burst into tears: for a suspicion, faint as the murmuring of far-off waters in the ears, had now for the first time sprung up in the secret depths of her soul,—a suspicion with regard to the virtue of Mrs. Brace and the respectability of her establishment.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE GRAND ENTERTAINMENT
AT CARLTON HOUSE.

It was half-past nine o'clock on the memorable Monday evening so anxiously anticipated by many hearts; and the state saloons of the princely dwelling were bathed as it were in a flood of roseate luxury.

Nothing could transcend—scarcely equal—the brilliancy of the scene.

The lustre of crystal chandeliers and innumerable wax-candles—the gorgeous mirrors—the splendid furniture, rich in crimson velvet, and glittering with inlaid gold—the costly vases of porcelain and alabaster, filled with hot-house flowers—the immense China jars whence perfumes exhaled—the warm and fragrant atmosphere—and the strains of delicious music which began to pour through the spacious apartment,—all these produced a magical effect, to ravish and enchant the senses.

The guests invited to the ball were now beginning to arrive; and the Prince of Wales, having already left the dinner-table, was conversing with those ladies who had been present at the select banquet.

There was Mrs. Fitzherbert, in all the grandeur of those charms which were now embellished by the richest and most tasteful toilette. Her hair, so pale in hue but so glossy and shining, appeared to have caught the golden rays of a brilliant noonday sun and to have imprisoned them in those luxuriant tresses, which showered over a back and shoulders of pearly whiteness, and caressed the full and finely rounded bosoms which the low dress left more than half exposed to the ravished eyes of the beholder.

Next to Mrs. Fitzherbert sate the Duchess of Devonshire, radiant in loveliness, and with glowing smiles upon her coral lips. Nature's own roses, which art cannot equal, blushed softly upon her cheeks; and her silky auburn hair was brilliant with all the richest metallic hues. Love, pleasure, and light were in her large deep hazel eyes: she was a glorious being—a splendid specimen of that finely developed, superb, and Juno-like beauty which in a moment can melt into the tender and yielding sensuousness of wanton Venus.

And in that same saloon where the Prince of Wales was now conversing

with Mr. Fitzherbert and Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire, there were other heavenly faces and lovely forms: and the lustre of the chandeliers was reflected in eyes bright as the diamonds that surmounted polished foreheads or glistened amidst shining hair. Gracefully, too, waved ostrich plumes over charming heads; and fair hands agitated the rich fans which raised a gentle zephyr in the midst of the warm, languid, and perfumed atmosphere;—and the rustling satin or the richly flowing velvet swept over the thick carpet, as light footsteps moved across that scene of pleasure.

The company invited to the ball had begun to arrive; and every minute some scion of the aristocracy—some noble, with a star upon his breast, or some lady bearing a proud name—made obeisance to the heir-apparent to the British throne.

Oh! who would have thought that two-thirds of the great nobles now assembled, were, if stripped of all the *prestige* of their rank and honours, nothing more nor less than the most infernal robbers, usurpers, and oppressors that ever preyed upon the vitals of the industrious millions?—or who would have fancied that more than half of those beauteous creatures gathered there, and who boasted an alliance with the first families in Britain, were the veriest demireps that ever reflected in the aristocratic sphere the profligacy and demoralization which parade the pavement to the metropolis?

But so it was *then*—so it is *at the present day*—and so it will *ever* be with the British Aristocracy until the knell of its corrupt, iniquitous, and accursed existence be rung by the mighty voice of the popular will.

To return however, to the thread of our narrative.

We have already stated that the Prince of Wales was conversing with his special favourites in one of the magnificent saloons thrown open at Carlton House upon the occasion of which we are writing: we should now add that in another apartment of the splendid site, the Princess Sophia was seated upon a sofa, surrounded by several ladies and nobles of the highest rank, and with whom she discoursed in a manner which they subsequently pronounced, in the usual nauseating phraseology of the Court, to be most “gracious” and “con-
descending.”

The Princess was in reality a very handsome woman. Her figure was modelled to the most voluptuous proportions: the plump, sloping shoulders—the long arching neck—and the exuberant bust were of the most dazzling whiteness;—and upon her cheeks the hues of the blushing rose and the stainless lily were delicately blended. Her large blue eyes languished with a wanton look—and her mouth had that unmistakable expression of sensuality which invariably marked and still marks every scion of the family of Brunswick. Her luxuriant light brown hair flowed in thousand shining ringlets over her shoulders; and she had a habit of every now and then slightly shaking her head as if it were a pleasure to hear the rustling of those glossy curls or to feel them moving upon her warm and polished flesh. In fine, her whole appearance conveyed the impression of an amorous young creature in whose imagination soft, tender, and wanton thoughts habitually floated, but whose passions were at times susceptible of being excited to a devouring heat and a furious intensity.

Such indeed was the Princess Sophia—one of the frail and licentious daughters of George the Third.

But we must leave her Royal Highness for a brief space, while we hasten to inform our readers that at about a quarter to ten o'clock the Earl of Desborough descended from his carriage at the principal entrance to Carlton House, assisted his beautiful Countess and the lovely Pauline Clarendon to alight. Then, giving an arm to each lady, he escorted them up the grand staircase.

Oh! how Pauline's heart beat as each step brought her nearer to that circle of light in which she knew that the master of that gorgeous scene was as it were embowered in luxury and enthroned in splendour. That she was about to behold Mr. Harley in the Prince of Wales, she had no longer any doubt: the scene at the Duchess of Devonshire's on the preceding day had removed all previously existing uncertainty upon that point. For Mrs. Mordaunt was the Princess Sophia—and this fact accounted for the sudden disappearance of Mr. Harley when the carriage broke down opposite Paradise Villas, on the first night of his acquaintance with Octavia and Pauline.

When, therefore, the younger Miss

Clarendon had reflected upon all the incidents of that night, and recalled to mind the ridiculous tale which Mr. Harley had related (on the occasion of his second visit to the villa) to account for his abrupt departure after gazing in at the window of the travelling-barouche,—when she pondered on all this, Pauline had naturally come to the conclusion that Mr. Harley *was* the Prince of Wales beyond all possibility of doubt.

With a beating heart, then, was it that the lovely creature now ascended the wide and brilliantly-lighted marble staircase; and the inward agitation which she experienced gave a rich crimson glow to her cheeks.

On her side, the Countess of Desborough was not altogether composed and tranquil. She abhorred the idea of meeting the Prince of Wales;—and—more than that—the night of love and pleasure which she had passed in the arms of Philip Ramsey, had rendered her as timid and bashful as a bride on the morning after her wedding. For conscience had its qualms—or rather its terrors with the really well principled Eleanor, who was a mere novice in the art of duplicity, and who was very far from being an experienced profligate. Thus was it whenever she recalled to mind her frailty of the past night, she felt a burning blush mantling upon her cheeks and suffusing itself over her neck and bosom; while it seemed to her that every eye which glanced upon her countenance could read her secret in that tell-true glow—and this thought, or rather sensation, made her blush all the more deeply and added to her confusion.

On reaching the summit of the grand stair-case, the Earl of Desborough left his beauteous wife and the charming Pauline at the door of the ladies' toilette-chamber, while he remained in a waiting room until they should rejoin him.

The Countess and Pauline accordingly entered the toilette-chamber; and the moment the door closed behind them, the former was accosted by Mrs. Brace and the latter by one of the numerous females in attendance there.

The blood mantled on Eleanor's cheeks, suffusing even her lofty brow and descending to her very neck and bosom, when the milliner of Pall Mall, with affable though profoundly respectful mien, advanced to receive the

velvet scarf which the patrician lady had thrown over her shoulders to defend herself against the chill night air when descending from the carriage.

The first impulse of the Countess was to pass the woman by in haughty indignation: but, sweeping her looks around, she beheld several ladies of her acquaintance—and, suddenly fearful of provoking a scene with Mrs. Brace, she paused and allowed the milliner to remove the scarf from her shoulders.

"One word, your ladyship—start not—but hear me!" whispered Mrs. Brace: "I declare most solemnly that I wish you well and seek to render you a service, in spite of the displeasure you have visited upon me."

Eleanor turned completely round—fixed her magnificent eyes keenly upon the milliner's countenance—and, perceiving a solemn earnestness in the woman's manner, said in a low voice, "Is it possible that you can have the power or the inclination to render me a service?"

"Yes—a most important service, lady, replied the milliner. "Draw near towards this mirror—there!—now permit me to arrange this straggling curl:" and, seizing the opportunity afforded by her having thus led the Countess aside, Mrs. Brace said in a deep and impressive, but only just audible voice, "The honour of your ladyship is at stake—you stand on the verge of ruin—and I alone can save you!"

Eleanor started—staggered—and supported herself by laying her hand on the shoulder of Mrs. Brace, who whispered, "Compose yourself—in the name of God! compose yourself! No harm is as yet done—the evil only menaces you *now*—it is not present."

"And that evil?" murmured Eleanor, her cheeks, her neck, and her bosom becoming again suffused with a crimson glow: for in the bewilderment of the moment, and with the milliner's ominous words still ringing in her ears, she naturally associated the warning she had just received with the love, voluptuousness, and frailty of the preceding night—that night which she had passed in the arms of Philip Ramsey! Therefore was it that, with a thousand conflicting ideas springing up in her imagination, the Countess murmured inquiringly, "And that evil?"

"I cannot explain myself now, dear

lady," responded Mrs. Brace, in the same rapid and low tone: "but believe me—oh! believe me—I wish you well."

"I shall endure the most torturing suspense until you have leisure to be more explicit," said the Countess, forgetting, in the agitation of her mind, that her words and manner were both calculated to make the milliner suspect that she had really done something of a nature which she would fain conceal and which she trembled to have made known.

"Your ladyship sees that I cannot enter into particulars *here*, nor at *present*," returned Mrs. Brace: then, pausing as if to reflect upon what course it would be better to pursue, and in another moment seeming to be inspired with an idea, she said, "At midnight precisely you can steal from the ball-rooms—on any pretence—no one will perceive you: and if your ladyship will then repair to the extremity of the long passage leading from the great landing, I will be there. But come alone—for to your ear only must I breathe the communication which I have to make."

"I will be there—at midnight—punctually," murmured Eleanor, her voice sounding hoarse and thick. "Give me a glass of water."

The milliner hastened to comply with this demand; and the limpid element went hissing down the parched throat of the Countess of Desborough.

"Is your ladyship better?" inquired Mrs. Brace, as she received back the glass.

"Yes—I thank you," responded Eleanor; and, by a desperate effort, she overcame her emotions. "At all events you assure me," she whispered rapidly to the milliner, "that the evil—whatever it is—can be averted."

"Tranquillise yourself completely on that head, my lady," said Mrs. Brace.

"I will—I must," observed the Countess. "At midnight—punctually."

And having darted a significant look upon the milliner, whose sincerity she no longer thought of doubting, Eleanor turned to rejoin Pauline Clarendon. This young lady's hair had required some little adjustment, which had just engaged the three or four minutes occupied by the above rapidly whispered dialogue between the Countess and Mrs. Brace.

It was now for the first time that the milliner observed that Eleanor's companion was now none other than

Pauline Clarendon: for when the two ladies had entered the room, Mrs. Brace was so intent upon affording the Countess her officious aid that she had not even thought of darting a glance at the beautiful creature who was with her. But now Mrs. Brace recognised Pauline immediately—not only on account of her marvellous likeness to her sister Octavia, but also from the fact of having seen them together on that morning when Camilla Morton had delivered the note at the house of Lord Florimel.

On thus recognising the young Miss Clarendon, a painful conviction instantly sprang up in the milliner's mind that something was wrong, and that the plot, as Florimel's letter had warned her, was indeed thickening. But what could she do? Nothing:—matters must take their chance:—and however great her anxiety and suspense now were, there was no alternative but to await the gradual development of circumstances as they should occur.

In the meantime,—while the bewildered Mrs. Brace was thus giving way to her hurried and agitated reflections,—Eleanor and Pauline had issued from the toilette-chamber, and rejoined the Earl: then, the former leaning on his right arm, and the latter on his left, they crossed the landing to the magnificent saloons from the open portals of which streamed the warm and perfumed atmosphere.

Gloriously handsome appeared the Countess of Desborough—bewitchingly beautiful was Pauline Clarendon. The agitation which each experienced—though from such widely different causes—tinged their cheeks with a roseate hue, which set off in more dazzling contrast the fairer and softer tints. But Eleanor's olive complexion looked rich and glowing, though of transparent purity, with her own heightened colour and in that blaze of golden lustre: while nothing could be whiter or more polished in the shape of living flesh than the forehead, neck, and bosom of Miss Clarendon.

How superb was Eleanor in her beauty—how fascinating was Pauline in her loveliness! The former seemed as if she were able to ravish a heart with one glance of her splendid black eyes—the other to steal it away with her soft and witching looks.

And now, as they entered those rooms where all was a blaze of attractions and an assemblage of charms,—

yet were they not lost in the bright galaxy: but they stood out from the radiant sphere as stars of an equal glory with Mrs. Fitzherbert, the Duchess of Devonshire, or the Princess Sophia.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

THE BALL-ROOM.

IT was to the Princess Sophia that the Earl of Desborough, the Countess, and Miss Pauline Clarendon, first paid their homage.

Her Royal Highness received Eleanor with a sisterly cordiality, and gave a most kind and flattering welcome to Pauline. Indeed, the ladies and nobles assembled in that apartment were astonished at the extreme air of friendliness and even familiarity with which the Princess proffered her hand to Miss Clarendon; and whisperingly they asked each other who she was.

This query was soon answered by some young nobleman who had seen and admired her at Lord Marchmont's ball; and a general anxiety prevailed to become acquainted with a young lady who appeared to enjoy the highest favour with her Royal Highness the Princess Sophia.

Lord Florimel, who had already arrived, was now speedily by the side of Pauline: but she was not as yet able to take his arm, inasmuch as it was necessary that she should remain with the Earl and Countess of Desborough until after the presentation to the Prince of Wales. Florimel saw that, beneath an exterior apparently calm, a considerable agitation and excitement prevailed in the bosom of the charming creature whom he loved so devotedly; and he seized an opportunity to whisper a few reassuring words in her ears.

"Be not uneasy on my account, dear Gabriel," she hastily but tenderly responded: "there will be no scene—no betrayal of anything extraordinary;—for I am already prepared to know *the worst* in respect to my unfortunate sister."

Florimel threw upon her a look full of affection; and Pauline rapidly returned it, as she again took the proffered arm of the Earl of Desborough, who was now about to conduct herself and the Countess in to the presence of

his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales.

Amidst the brilliant assemblage they passed;—and in a few minutes they crossed the threshold of the unfolded portals leading into the room where the heir-apparent was conversing, as already described, with Mrs. Fitzherbert and Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire.

And now Pauline Clarendon summoned all her courage to her aid—nerved herself with all the presence of mind she could possibly command—and exerted every energy to maintain her composure.

Another moment—and she came within view of the Prince of Wales!

From her cheeks fled, in an instant, the rich hues of the rose—a cold tremor struck her as if an ice-shaft had pierced her bosom—and the Earl of Desborough felt her hand sliding from his arm.

"Courage, Miss Clarendon!" he whispered hastily: for the nobleman imagined that she was overawed by the presence of the heir-apparent.

The words recalled Pauline to herself: the colour came back to her cheeks—and she threw another rapid look towards his Royal Highness.

Oh! there was not the faintest possibility of mistake: 'twas he—Mr. Harley—the seducer of her sister!

A dizziness again seized upon Pauline as this conviction burst upon her—rather as the last glimmering of uncertainty was dissipated in a moment: but with an instinctive or mechanical motion she kept by the Earl's side—measuring her pace to his—leaning lightly upon his arm—and appearing to be embarrassed only by that species of timidity which young ladies are accustomed to feel when introduced into the presence of Royalty.

And now the Earl suddenly stopped short—and Pauline made a low obeisance because she supposed it to be the moment to do so, as, indeed, it was—and she heard her own name mentioned by the Countess of Desborough who was thus presenting her to his Royal Highness—and then, timidly raising her eyes, she saw in an instant that the Prince was exerting almost superhuman efforts to conceal the trouble which agitated his countenance.

Never, until Pauline's dying-day, did she forget the look which his Royal Highness wore at the moment when their glances thus met. Rage—

terror—amazement—confusion—uncertainty how to act, were all depicted upon those lineaments: but quick as the eye could wink, they became composed and settled once more—so that none present save Pauline beheld that evanescent whirlwind of conflicting feelings which swept over his features.

Recovering all his presence of mind—or rather, suddenly arming himself with the courage of desperation—George Prince of Wales addressed a few affable observations to the Countess of Desborough—said something particularly friendly to the Earl—and then, darting upon Pauline a look of peculiar significance, half imploring and half commanding her to be silent with respect to her previous knowledge of him, he at once invited her to open the ball with him.

The Duchess of Devonshire and the Countess of Desborough were amazed at this extraordinary and unprecedented proceeding on the part of his Royal Highness; and Mrs. Fitzherbert instantly became scarlet with anger.

For, according to the usual etiquette, the Prince should have opened the ball with some lady of the highest rank: whereas he was about to bestow this exclusive honour upon a plain *Miss*, who was comparatively unknown in the fashionable circles of the metropolis.

No wonder, then, that the Duchess of Devonshire and the Countess of Desborough were amazed: but we must add that they were well pleased for Pauline's sake also. Indeed the young lady had become a special favourite with them both; and as the former was not jealous of her royal paramour's proceedings, and as the latter had nothing to be jealous of in that respect, they experienced a generous satisfaction at this brilliant triumph which Pauline was about to enjoy. For, in the courtly circles of those times, it was considered a grand thing for any young lady thus to attract the attention of Royalty; and doubtless the same sicken, nauseating, maudlin sentiment prevails at the present day.

But Mrs. Fitzherbert could scarcely restrain her rage. First she became scarlet—then pale as a sheet; and her superb bosom stood upheaved, with the suspended breath, for nearly a minute, when it began to throb and palpitate tumultuously. For, as ignorant as the others present concerning the motives which could possibly have induced the Prince to accord the

honour of his hand to Miss Pauline Clarendon for the first quadrille, Mrs. Fitzherbert naturally supposed that he was smitten with her beauty; and although she knew that he was not a saint, yet this was the first time that he had ever appeared to treat herself with such marked insult and another with such conspicuous favour in her presence.

As for Pauline—overwhelmed with confusion at the unexpected invitation which she had received, she murmured a few scarcely intelligible words of thanks for the honour conferred upon her; and, ere she was half recovered from the bewilderment into which the entire proceeding had thrown her, she found the Prince proffering her his arm to lead her into the adjacent apartment, where the dancing was to take place.

The quadrille was soon formed; and many a titled lady cast envious eyes upon Pauline, as his Royal Highness conducted her amidst the glittering throng to the head of the room.

The Duchess of Devonshire and the Countess of Desborough gave their hands to partners in that first dance, which the Princess Sophia likewise graced with her presence.

But where was Mrs. Fitzherbert? Overcome with a rage to which she dared not however give vent, she had retreated precipitately from the suite of gilded saloons where this magnificent entertainment took place.

"Pauline, I thank you for the forbearance which you exercised towards me ere now," whispered the Prince of Wales, while the gentle symphonies were floating through the rooms. "You have not been attracted hither by the same motive which has brought the other moths to flit around the light of Royalty: you came to clear up a doubt—to confirm a suspicion!" added the heir-apparent, emphatically, although in a low voice: for he now comprehended the meaning of those portions of Lord Florimel's letter which are printed in *italic*.

"Your Royal Highness thanks me for my forbearance," said Pauline, looking down and speaking in a tremulous tone: "but I deserve no praise for having exercised a proper control over my feelings. Think you that I obtained an introduction hither for the sake of proclaiming my sister's wrongs aloud? No: I am not so insensate," she added, raising her eyes

and fixing them for a moment upon the countenance of the Prince.

"I read a stern decision in your looks, Pauline," he said with a visible tremor: "what does it mean?"

"It means that justice must be done to my sister—or that her wrongs shall be bitterly avenged," answered Pauline, in reality speaking with a strong emphasis, but still without any excitement being apparent to the eyes of those who stood near.

"Vengeance?—do you talk of vengeance, Pauline?" said the Prince, unable to control an ironical modulation of his voice.

"Remember that it is as foolish as it is rude to breathe such a word in the ears of one who can crush his private enemies, as if they were worms."

"Your Royal Highness's sister, the Princess Sophia, will protect and shield me—for her own sake," answered Pauline, in a cold, firm, and collected tone.

Fortunate was it for the Prince of Wales that the quadrille commenced at this moment, and that the start which he gave, as Miss. Clarendon mentioned his royal sister's name was thus absorbed as it were in the opening of the Terpsichorean evolutions. For like lightning searing his brain, did the remembrance flash to his imagination that the Princess's frailty was known to Pauline; and this circumstance had escaped his memory and been totally lost sight of during the brief and hurried dialogue which we have just described.

"Pauline," he said, when the arrangements of the dance again allowed them an opportunity of conversing, "it is impossible that we can talk at our ease upon a certain subject this evening. But—tell me—does your sister know that you were to be presented at Carlton House."

"Octavia entertains not the remotest suspicion of my intention," interrupted Pauline. "She is unaware that I have undertaken the championship of her wrongs—the vindication of the black treachery which has been practised upon her."

"Your words are severe young lady," said his Royal Highness, with flushing countenance.

"Not more severe than your conduct deserve," responded Pauline, mildly but firmly.

"Well—we will discuss all this on as early an occasion as you choose to appoint," observed the Prince. "But

answer me one or two questions, Pauline—for you are not so ungenerous as to leave me in a state of suspense on points of no possible interest to yourself.”

“Certainly not,” said the young lady. “If your Royal Highness will put those questions—”

“You will answer them? Thanks for the assurance which your words imply. Tell me, then—are the Earl and Countess of Desborough aware of your object in coming hither this evening?”

“On my honour, they are *not*,” replied Pauline, emphatically: “they believe that I am instigated by those mingled motives of curiosity and vanity which young ladies naturally entertain in this respect.”

“And now tell me whether Lord Florimel—”

“Yes—he is acquainted with *all* my motives,” interrupted Pauline. “I will not deceive your Royal Highness in a single point: but at the same time I will assure you that Lord Florimel is incapable of betraying this secret so long as it shall please *me* to keep it and have it kept.”

“One word more, Pauline,” said his Royal Highness: then, sinking his voice to a whisper which was barely audible, he asked, “Does Lord Florimel know of that adventure at the villa in the Edgeware Road—that adventure, I mean, in which my sister the Princess Sophia—”

“God forbid that I should have betrayed a secret which every sentiment of honour, propriety, and humanity has hitherto enjoined me to keep!” exclaimed Pauline, in a low but emphatic tone.

“You are really a noble-minded girl!” said the prince, not making the remark in the hope of conciliating Pauline’s favour in the affair of her sister, but speaking with a sincerity which he expressed as it were in spite of himself.

Again did the requisitions of the dance compel them to break off their discourse; and as soon as they were once more enabled to resume it, the Prince said, “when and where will you oblige me with an interview, Pauline?”

“I will write to your Royal Highness in the course of a few days,” was the answer. “In the meantime, fear not that the breath of scandal shall be allowed to sport with the united names of yourself and Octavia.”

“But you will tell Octavia that you have been here to night?—you will reveal to her that the identity of her lover with the Prince of Wales is no longer subject to a doubt?” said the heir-apparent: “and then she will betray everything in the frantic wildness of her grief—”

“You know, then, that her anguish will be rending in the extreme,” interrupted Pauline: “and yet you seem to be more solicitous for your own safety than for the peace of mind of that confiding and innocent girl whom you have ruined. Prince of Wales, I hate you for your inordinate selfishness,” added Pauline, in a low but strangely emphatic tone: and for an instant her eyes, usually so melting and tender, shot forth the lightnings of an implacable feeling as she fixed her looks on the countenance of the heir-apparent.

“It is better that we should converse no longer on *this* subject, Miss Clarendon,” he said, deeply humiliated, yet unable to resent what he conceived to be the insult conveyed in the spirited young lady’s words. “You have promised to write to me—and in the interval,” he observed, assuming a kinder tone, “I trust to your goodness to pacify Octavia. Any reparation which it lies within my power to make—”

“Your Royal Highness perceives that the quadrille is now over,” interrupted Pauline, coldly; “and, as you yourself have observed, it will be better not to prolong our discourse on a very painful subject.”

The Prince of Wales made no reply, but conducted the young lady to a seat, where he left her with a bow. Florimel was almost immediately afterwards by her side; and, with a look full of solicitude, he said, “My beloved Pauline, you have passed through a most painful ordeal—I know you have! That your worst suspicions are confirmed, I am certain—and that the Prince has been talking to you upon the subject, is apparent from your manner.”

“Heavens! Gabriel,” murmured the young lady, seriously alarmed: “do my looks indicate that the topic of conversation between his Royal Highness and myself was a serious or unusual nature? If so, a strange and prejudicial construction may be put thereon: and it may be supposed,” she added, a deep blush spreading over her countenance, “that I am one of

those vain and silly women who would glory in their very frailty so long as it was a Prince that seduced them into error."

"Tranquillise yourself, dearest Pauline," said Florimel:—"to the eyes of all this glittering throng there was nothing peculiar in your looks or manner—nothing to encourage a belief that his Royal Highness was addressing you otherwise than in the usual strain of empty compliment and frivolous gallantry which prevail at such scenes as this. But to me, Pauline—to *me*, who am your lover—your adorer—your intended husband,—and who likewise was aware of the motive which brought you hither,—to *me*, I say, it was different; and I saw that your cheeks flushed sometimes—then grew pale suddenly,—I saw also that you were profoundly excited in reality, though wearing an exterior of calmness and tranquillity. Yes—all this I observed, my Pauline—and I pitied you."

"Dearest Gabriel! your kind words recompense me for much of the pain which I have just endured," said the young lady. "But we shall be observed if we continue to discourse in a style that is naturally accompanied by a kindred seriousness of the countenance. Come," she added, a brilliant smile animating her lovely features; "give me your arm and let us take our place in the quadrille which is now forming for I presume that we are to dance together this time."

And the bright and beautiful pair rose from their seats to join the second quadrille.

In the meantime the Prince of Wales, leaving Pauline, bethought himself of the sudden and abrupt manner in which he had left Mrs. Fitzherbert, some twenty minutes previously; and it now struck him that she was probably offended at the favour which he had shown to Miss Clarendon in selecting her as his partner, instead of some lady of high rank, for the first quadrille.

Returning, therefore, to the room where he had previously been seated with Mrs. Fitzherbert, he looked round for her in vain; and having traversed the entire suite of splendid saloons without perceiving her, he accosted the Duchess of Devonshire for information.

Drawing her Grace aside from a group of ladies with whom she was conversing, the Prince said, "Where is Mrs. Fitzherbert?"

"Indeed, I have not seen her since the commencement of the first quadrille," answered Georgiana. "And now that I recollect, she did not dance —"

"I can understand it all," interrupted the Prince, in a tone of vexation: "she is offended with me, because I choose to honour Miss Pauline Clarendon by selecting her for that quadrille—and she has doubtless retired to her own apartment in a pet. Now, my dear Georgiana, you must go and persuade her to return ere her absence be so prolonged as to occasion unpleasant comment."

"I had rather that your Royal Highness would find me a more agreeable employment," said the Duchess, pouting her beauteous lips; "for to tell you the truth," she added, sinking her voice to a low whisper, and fixing upon him a significant look, "it is no pleasant task to act as peace-maker between husband and wife."

"Georgiana," said the Prince, likewise in a low tone, but with almost a savage emphasis, and certainly with a ferocious look, "I command you not to speak thus of myself and Mrs. Fitzherbert."

"I was only anxious to hear what you would say in reply," observed the sprightly Duchess, by no means abashed, but with an enchanting gaiety of tone and manner and a species of wicked, mischief-loving archness which rendered her beautiful countenance absolutely radiant at the moment. "However," she exclaimed, tapping the Prince's arm with her fan,— "since I have rendered you angry, I will endeavour to atone for my indiscretion by acting as a peace-maker between your Royal Highness and Mrs. Fitzherbert."

With these words, the Duchess of Devonshire turned away and quitted the room in order to seek the private apartments of Mrs. Fitzherbert: and the Prince of Wales, at that moment catching a glimpse of the Countess of Desborough's fine figure as she moved with mingled elegance and grace through the labyrinthine dance, was reminded of the plot he had set afloat in regard to her.

We have already observed that Eleanor looked perfectly splendid on the present occasion; and the royal voluptuary was fired with a devouring passion as his eyes now followed that magnificent form which seemed to glow with all the ardour of its own

temperament beneath the exciting influence of the Muse Terpsichore.

Anxious to learn whether Mrs. Brace had succeeded in playing the part entrusted to her, the Prince quitted the ball-room—traversed the landing—and entered a private chamber, where a page was in attendance. This youth was despatched to summon Mrs. Brace to his royal master's presence; and in a few minutes the milliner made her appearance.

"What news concerning the charming Eleanor?" said the Prince, the moment they were alone together.

"Her ladyship has completely fallen into the snare," responded the unprincipled woman; "and she will meet me at midnight in the appointed place."

"So far, so good!" exclaimed his Royal Highness: then, referring to his watch, he observed, "It is now half past eleven o'clock—mind you are punctual at your post."

"Fear nothing on that head," returned Mrs. Brace. "So far as the matter depends upon me, the beautiful Countess of Desborough will be in your power! That she also will be punctual, I have no doubt: for the mysterious words which, according to your instructions, I breathed in her ears, produced a magical effect. With all her pride and display of virtue, that haughty lady is not immaculate: conscious of some frailty, she trembles lest her secret be already known. Otherwise she would never have fallen into the trap which has this night been set to ensnare her."

"O charming Eleanor," exclaimed the Prince, carried away by the violence of his licentious longing,—"within an hour shall I clasp thee in my arms—within an hour shall I have revelled in thy beauties!"

"And is it possible that your Royal Highness can thus give free course to these thoughts and hopes, while a terrible danger appears to be menacing you?" demanded Mrs. Brace: "for surely you must have already seen Pauline Clarendon here to-night?—and can her visit bode any good to you?"

"I have seen her—and no danger is to be apprehended for the moment," answered the Prince.

"But she knows your Royal Highness to be Mr. Harley—or Mr. Harley to be your Royal Highness—whichever you choose?" exclaimed the milliner.

"Yes—yes: all that she knows

perfectly," said the heir-apparent; "and a very extraordinary girl she is. Gifted with a remarkable spirit—great presence of mind—and wonderful courage, she can defy care, and threaten a Prince. Nay, more—to my very face she told me that she hated me."

"And yet your Royal Highness declares that there is no danger!" cried Mrs. Brace, in a species of bewilderment.

"Not for the present, I tell you," exclaimed George, who was a firm believer in the Christian maxim which says, *Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*. "Pauline will let me know very shortly what she wishes me to do in her sister's matter;—and when the time comes—why—then we'll think about it. You know I am not a man who meets misfortune half-way: I hate anticipating evil;—'tis bad enough when it comes! And, now, my dear Fanny, I must thank you for the aid you have rendered me in my scheme respecting Lady Desborough."

With these words, his Royal Highness imprinted a kiss upon the lips of the handsome milliner; and having once more conjured her to be punctual at the place of appointment, he sped back to the brilliant saloons where the dancing was going on with increasing spirit.

The Duchess of Devonshire had already returned thither; and the Prince was speedily by her side.

"What news, my dear Georgiana?" demanded he.

"I cannot find Mrs. Fitzherbert in her apartments," answered the Duchess. "She is not there—and I am assured, in answer to the inquiries which I made, that her servants have not seen her since the commencement of the ball."

"Very strange!" ejaculated the Prince: then, in a calmer and far more indifferent tone, he observed, "But there are plenty of other rooms in Carlton House to which she could have retired for the purpose of enjoining her sulks;—and I shall not trouble myself farther in the matter. Thanks however, Georgiana, to you for your kindness in endeavouring to seek her."

The Prince remained in conversation with the charming and sprightly Duchess for about ten minutes longer—at the expiration of which period he again quitted the brilliant saloons.

CHAPTER LXXV.

ANOTHER SCENE AT CARLTON HOUSE.

THE Countess of Desborough had appeared radiantly beautiful to all eyes; but that carnation glow which suffused her cheeks with its richest hue, was heightened by the conflicting emotions that warred within her bosom, as well as by the effort which she made to conceal them.

In the little leisure which the excitement of the brilliant scene and the gay dance left her to commune with herself, she had vainly endeavoured to conjecture what could be the aim and nature of the mysterious warning given her by Mrs. Brace. Was it possible that her frailty, with the individual whom she knew as Gustavus Wakefield, and whom she already loved with an earnest and devoted affection,—was it possible that this frailty could be known, or even suspected! And, if not, then how could her fair fame be menaced?—and how could evil or danger be threatening her? Lastly, whatever were the peril, how happened it that Mrs. Brace, of all women in the world, should be able and willing to rescue her from its consequences?

These thoughts swept, with whirlwind speed, many times through the brain of the Countess of Desborough during the evening: but the oftener they recurred to her mind, the more bewildering did they seem—and the less easy was it to hazard a conjecture upon a single point.

Tortured with the cruellest suspense—harassed with the most painful misgiving—at one moment fearful that some treachery was intended—at another experiencing a full revival of confidence in the sincerity of the milliner,—now trembling lest the Prince of Wales himself should be at the bottom of the whole affair—then reassuring herself with the argument that he would never dare to devise any plot or perpetrate any outrage against her beneath his own roof and on such an occasion as the present,—at one time resolving to treat the thing with contempt—at another deciding upon keeping the appointment,—now painfully recalling to mind the milliner's former misconduct and duplicity—then starting at the recollection of the solemn and impressive manner in which the warning was given,—thus, torn with a thousand

conflicting sentiments, the Countess of Desborough knew not how to act.

At length—when still undecided—her eyes encountered a time-piece: the hands marked midnight!

Rapidly sweeping her looks around, she saw that her husband was conversing at a distance with some other noblemen—that the Duchess of Devonshire was talking to Pauline Clarendon and Florimel—and that the Princess Sophia was engaged with a group of ladies in another quarter.

For the first time during the evening did the Countess, therefore, now find herself so entirely alone, as it were—amidst the brilliant throng—that she could escape without being perceived from the saloons.

Should she go?—should she keep the appointment?

Yes: an invincible feeling urged her to adopt the affirmative course—for her conscience, making a coward of her in one sense, prompted her to hasten and learn the nature of the peril which threatened her.

Behold her issuing forth from the gorgeous saloons. There are servants on the landing—in the ante-chambers; but what of that? She may be going to the toilette-room or to Mrs. Fitzherbert's apartments. It does not, therefore, seem strange that she should thus have left the saloons—alone!

The passage is gained: lightly and rapidly she threads it. Mrs. Brace is waiting for her at the end. The milliner places her finger with mysterious significance upon her lip—and hastily throws open a door. Eleanor crosses the threshold: the door closes noiselessly behind her.

But, without perceiving that she is alone—indeed, fancying that the milliner is following her—she traverses a small ante-chamber lighted by a lamp held in the hand of an alabaster statue. An open door faces her: she unhesitatingly enters the apartment with which it communicates;—but scarcely has she crossed the threshold when this door is likewise closed behind her—and she is clasped in the arms of the Prince of Wales!

Eleanor saw that she was betrayed: but, without giving vent to shrieks or screams,—she was too courageous a woman for such an ebullition of pusillanimous feeling,—she disengaged herself with a desperate effort from his arms. Then, rapidly smoothing her disordered hair, she said in a low tone of remarkable decision, "I will

sooner perish than become your victim!"

And her magnificent eyes darted forth lightnings upon the countenance of the heir-apparent.

"Haughty lady, you are in my power," he exclaimed, nothing discomfited; "and no human aid can rescue you therefrom."

"What means your Royal Highness?" demanded Eleanor, drawing her fine form up to its full height, and assuming a bearing so splendid and queen-like in its dignified indignation, that for a few moments the unprincipled voluptuary was indeed overawed.

"What means your Royal Highness?" she repeated, in a voice that trembled not: then, sweeping her eyes rapidly around, and perceiving that it was a bed-chamber to which foul treachery had thus inveigled her, she said, "If you intend to exert brute force to retain me here, then will I resist you to the utmost of my power. There are windows," she continued, pointing towards the casements; "and I will summon assistance thence. If no succour should come, I will precipitate myself therefrom sooner than become the victim of a miscreant voluptuary such as you!"

"By heaven; your words would provoke me strangely, proud and self-sufficient lady," exclaimed the prince,—"were you not so completely in my power that I can take full and ample vengeance upon you. But, oh! you are so handsome—so divinely beautiful," he said, his voice suddenly assuming a melting tone and his countenance a tender expression,— "that I would not for worlds remain your enemy if you would only permit me to be your friend."

"My friend! repeated the Countess, with bitter irony: "is it to insult and mock one whom you have already cruelly outraged, that you use those words? But I understand you, Prince of Wales!" she exclaimed in a nobler, bolder, and loftier tone, while her countenance became lighted up with an animation that gave her the aspect of an avenging goddess:—"yes—I understand you now! You imagine that because you are his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales—eldest son of the King of England—and heir-apparent to the throne on which that monarch sits,—you imagine, I say, that because you have only one more step to ascend in order to reach the

pinnacle of earthly splendour and grasp the sceptre of an empire upon which the sun never sets,—you imagine that because the accident of birth has placed you in a position so proud as this, you have a right to trample upon all those usages, customs, or proprieties which may militate against your own selfish pleasures. Yes—that is your arrogance—that is your presumption. You fancy yourself a god—whereas you are but a very miserable and despicable man!"

So astounded was the Prince of Wales at being thus addressed, that he stood gazing in stupid wonderment upon the brave and spirited lady who dared to read him such a lesson: and this, let the reader recollect, was the second time that he had been reproved and set at defiance by female lips upon the memorable evening whose incidents we are describing.

"I have heard of Republican writers and Democratic speakers," continued the Countess of Desborough; "and hitherto I have been inclined to join in the common hatred which animates the aristocracy against them. But hear me, Prince of Wales—hear me while I solemnly proclaim and declare that I now cease to wonder that men should desire to abolish Monarchy and level thrones, when I think how vile, corrupt, and profligate Kings and Princes generally are. And now," she added, abruptly turning towards the door, "you will detain me at your peril."

"The door is locked," said the Prince, with a smile in which vindictive malignity and gloating licentiousness were strangely commingled. "I was concealed behind it when you entered—and expecting a scene, I took the precaution to secure it."

Thus speaking, he leant upon the mantel-piece and surveyed the Countess with the insolent freedom of a libertine and the cowardly menace of a bully.

"You are a villain!" she exclaimed, her face, neck, and bosom becoming scarlet with indignation. "Suffer me to depart—or I will no longer hesitate to raise my voice and summon assistance by my screams."

"The shrillest scream and the loudest shriek," said the Prince of Wales, in a tone of cold and ferocious triumph, "will not penetrate beyond these four walls. There are double casements to those windows; between this inner door and the outer one there is

an ante-chamber. Scream, then—shriek—beauteous Eleanor—and all will be in vain!”

“Then will I resist you with my teeth—my nails!” exclaimed the Countess, her eyes shooting forth fiery arrow upon the Prince.

“Never have you appeared to me more lovely—more enchanting—more desirable than now,” said his Royal Highness, perfectly unmoved by that threat. “Your cheeks blush a more delicious red with the fury of indignation—your eyes are as bright as meteors—your lips are of a livelier scarlet—and the teeth shine between them like dazzling pearls. Oh! you are a divine, a heavenly creature, Eleanor—dearest Eleanor;—far, far more beauteous at this moment than when you lay reclining in my arms upon the sofa at your own dwelling, and when I might have become the master of your charms had opportunity then served. In the name of God! why not manifest equal kindness towards me now?—wherefore compel me to wrest by force those enjoyments which it were paradise to have yielded voluntarily?”

“I confess that there was a time when—in a moment of weakness—I forgot my own dignity in your presence,” said the Countess: “but, thank heaven; your triumph was not complete—nor shall it ever be!”

“And yet the proud and haughty Eleanor cannot look me in the face and declare that she has never proved faithless to her husband—never embraced a lover in her arms!” exclaimed the Prince of Wales, fixing a searching look upon the lady’s countenance.

“What mean you?—what—?”

And Eleanor, gasping for breath, supported herself by clinging to the mantel.

“Ah! then my surmise was not wrong?” cried the Prince, in a triumphant tone. “Oh! I am well acquainted with the world, Eleanor—well experienced in the female heart. The moment I learnt ere now that you had yielded to the device set to ensnare you, I felt assured that it was a conscious guilt which had made you coward enough to seek to know more. Were you an innocent woman, against whom scandal could not even raise its breath, you would have treated Mrs. Brace and her intrigues with disdain. Nay—those intrigues would have appeared so transparent that you must have seen through them in a moment.

“You are adding the grossest insult to the most wanton injury,” murmured the unhappy Eleanor, her courage and presence of mind failing her rapidly.

“Had you not treated *me* with insult on that night when you promised to admit me to your chamber,” said the Prince, “there never would have been a word or a look of anger or disagreement between us. But, because a certain incident took place—as unforeseen as it was as unfortunate—you barred your door against me. Think you, haughty lady, that I had no feelings to wound—no bitter disappointment to endure? Assuredly I had: and it was in consequence of the cruel—heartless—capricious treatment which I then experienced at your hands, that I resolved to make you mine sooner or later. And now, Lady Desborough—since it appears to be *my* turn to speak at length,” he continued in a tone of enhanced triumph,—“I crave your attention.”

“My God! suffer me to depart;” exclaimed the unhappy lady, glancing in wild terror around the room.

“Listen, I say!” cried the Prince emphatically. “Upon *my* absence from the ball-room no one will dare to comment: upon *your* absence, on the contrary, strange whispers and remarks will speedily circulate. The absence of *both of us* at the same time cannot fail to engender certain suspicions;—and I leave you to judge whether they will be more prejudicial to you or to me. Now, beauteous Eleanor, do you begin to see the position in which you are placed?”

“And despair nerves me with courage!” suddenly ejaculated the lovely woman, who did indeed appear lovelier still in her indignation, “You may keep me a prisoner here, Prince of Wales,” she cried, darting looks of defiance at the heir-apparent: “but I take God to witness that, be the consequences what they may, the first use I shall make of my liberty will be to hasten into the presence of a magistrate or a judge and demand whether there be no law to reach even your Royal Highness.

“You are talking nonsense—utter nonsense, Eleanor!” said George, his lips curling with contempt. “In the first place, Kings, Queens, Princes, and Princesses may do just what they please—for they are *above* the law and *stronger* than the law; and the law was only made to keep the millions in subjection to *them*! Think you, then

that magistrates or judges would dare to entertain a charge against a Prince? No—no: they would sooner hang ten thousand innocent working men, than even venture upon a reprimand to a guilty scion of Royalty.”

“But if you detain me here—by force—against my will,” exclaimed Eleanor, “the scandal—the shame—the infamy that will result——”

“Can all be dispersed and set at rest in a moment,” interrupted his Royal Highness, with a promptitude showing that he had well considered the subject. “For how stands the matter? Mrs. Brace will step forward and declare that she managed the whole intrigue—that the Countess of Desborough of her own accord proceeded to a certain bed-chamber where she met the Prince of Wales—and that it is a mere maudlin sentiment of compunction, or else a feeling of jealousy, which makes her turn round upon her royal paramour to denounce him. There, Eleanor—the story is cut and dried—all in readiness;—and you see that everything can be accounted for as naturally as possible.”

“Yes—I indeed perceive that you are capable of any villany,” exclaimed the Countess, darting a look of deadly hatred upon the Prince of Wales. “I already knew you to be profligate—extravagant—selfish—ungrateful—and heartless: but it was reserved from the incident of this night to teach me that you are a villain.”

“The sooner I close that abusive mouth with kisses the better!” cried the Prince, with a voice and look of vindictive triumph;—and, extending his arms, he rushed towards the Countess.

“Hold!” ejaculated a full-toned female voice;—and from behind the curtains of the bed stepped forth a lady whose flashing eyes, crimson countenance, and quivering lips proclaimed a rage not easy to be appeased.

It was Mrs. Fitzherbert!

A cry of joy and triumph burst from the lips of the Countess of Desborough: but a terrible oath—an imprecation so fearful that we dare not attempt to record it—fell from the tongue of the Prince of Wales.

“Madam, you have doubtless heard all that has passed between his Royal—I mean, between *this man*,” exclaimed Eleanor, pointing disdainfully and loathingly at the Prince, “—and myself?

“Yes—every syllable,” answered Mrs. Fitzherbert, darting furious glances on the heir-apparent, who folded his arms, leant against the mantel, and endeavoured to assume an air of indifference.

“You will therefore agree with me, madam,” continued the Countess, that I have been subjected to an outrage as vile as the spirit which suggested it must be cowardly and despicable?”

“We will not use hard words, if your ladyship pleases,” said Mrs. Fitzherbert, bending a severe look upon Eleanor; “for, according to one portion of the dialogue which ere now took place between yourself and his Royal Highness it would appear that he has received some considerable amount of encouragement on the part of your ladyship. Nay—it would even seem,” she added, with a caustic emphasis, “that on one particular occasion his Royal Highness should have become the partner of your ladyship’s bed, had not some unforeseen incident prevented so agreeable a result.”

“Madam,” said the Countess of Desborough, recovering all her dignity, and fixing her magnificent eyes with grand effect upon Mrs. Fitzherbert,—“if you yourself be immaculate, then wherefore is it that you are not styled her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales?—but if, on the other hand, you have no claim to that distinction, how dare you undertake the part of moralist with me? Tell me that you are the wife of his Royal Highness, and you will then bring a blush to my cheek, and I shall fall upon my knees and implore your pardon for ever having wronged you in thought, though never indeed: but if you be only Mrs. Fitzherbert—the mistress of the heir-apparent——”

“Silence, madam!” cried the lady whom Eleanor thus boldly addressed in such words of sarcasm: then, stamping her foot imperiously, Mrs. Fitzherbert drew herself up to her full height—and, in a tone and manner of the loftiest dignity, she exclaimed, “It is time that your ladyship should learn whom you have insulted and outraged—for I am indeed her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales!”

“My God! what have you said?—what madness have you perpetrated?” exclaimed the heir-apparent, suddenly becoming fearfully excited: and, seizing Mrs. Fitzherbert—for so we had better continue to call her, inasmuch as she was never known by any higher

name to the world,—seizing her by the wrist, we say, the Prince muttered in a low, hoarse, and thick tone, “I am aware that my conduct has been bad this evening towards you: but your vengeance is terrible in the extreme! For by proclaiming yourself to be my wife, you have endangered my very heritage of the British crown!”

A deadly pallor came over the countenance of Mrs. Fitzherbert, as she was thus painfully reminded of the tremendous indiscretion of which she had been guilty: but almost instantly recovering her presence of mind, she took the Countess of Desborough’s hands in both her own, saying, “Let us pardon each other for the harsh words which we have exchanged—and let us henceforth be friends.”

“Oh! cheerfully—cheerfully!” cried the generous hearted Eleanor, in a tone of fervent sincerity. “Your Royal Highness—”

“Hush!” exclaimed the other: “you must never fail to call me *Mrs. Fitzherbert*! I will not ask you to swear to keep this secret—because I know that your ladyship is a woman of honour, and it would be an insult to exact a vow to that effect: but I will implore you—by that friendship which I now proffer you and which I ask you to vouchsafe me in return—”

Fear not, dear lady, that I shall ever breathe a word calculated to give you offence,” interrupted the Countess of Desborough: then, without deigning even to notice the Prince of Wales, she said, “You will have the kindness to accompany me back to the ball-rooms; so that, if my absence has been perceived, may be supposed that I have been in your society during the interval.”

“Certainly,” exclaimed Mrs. Fitzherbert, instantly recognising the prudence of the step thus suggested; then, turning towards the Prince of Wales, she said in a cold tone of reproach, “Have you no apology to offer to this generous hearted lady?”

“The Countess of Desborough will accept none at my hands,” said the heir-apparent, doggedly.

“It were a miserable affectation on my part—indeed, it would amount to a piece of sycophancy of which I am utterly incapable,” observed Eleanor, “were I to declare that any apology, however humble, could appease the indignation which I experience. On that head, therefore, my dear Mrs.

Fitzherbert, let no more be said. Henceforth the Prince of Wales will treat me with ceremonious courtesy—and I shall behave towards him with reserved and cold respect. Let such be the understanding; and on that condition, I shall never breathe a word relative to the incidents of this night. And it will be the fault of his Royal Highness,” she added significantly, “if I do not carry the secret thereof to my grave.”

“I understand your ladyship,” said the Prince, assuming a stern and haughty air: “but be well assured that, after everything which has passed in this chamber within the last half-hour, I am now led to hate you as cordially as ever I felt interested in you.”

“The hatred of your Royal Highness will prove much more tolerable to me than your love,” exclaimed Eleanor, the natural pride and dignity of her sex dictating this cutting taunt.

And the Prince felt the withering sarcasm and writhed under it—although he affected to turn aside and hum an opera-air. But, Oh! for *him*—the worshipped, idolized, and deified heir-apparent to be thus treated with indifference,—for *him*—the handsomest man and most fascinating gentleman in Europe to be thus spurned as it were by that indignant and haughty but noble-minded lady,—Oh! it was intolerable,—and the very tune which he affected to hum, hissed between his lips like a reptile’s craving for vengeance!

But, without waiting to observe the result which her retort had produced, the Countess of Desborough unlocked the door—threw it open—and made way for Mrs. Fitzherbert to pass. But this lady whispered, with a half-smile, “Remember that I am not to be known by you as the Princess of Wales;”—and the Countess accordingly went forth first, Mrs. Fitzherbert following close behind.

The ante-chamber was traversed, and Eleanor was about to open the outer-door, when the Prince of Wales suddenly exclaimed, “Stop for a single moment!”

The two ladies paused accordingly: but Mrs. Fitzherbert only turned towards him.

And it was to her that a sudden idea had prompted him to utter a few words.

“You are about to seek again the company whom I have invited to

Carlton House this evening," he said, in a low and impressive tone. "Now, it either becomes necessary for me to return amongst them also—or for you to circulate a rumour of sudden indisposition as a plea for my absence."

"And wherefore can you not return to the ball rooms—*presently*?" demanded Mrs. Fitzherbert, in a cold tone, and with as strong emphasis upon the last word, as much as to imply that he must not think of offering to accompany herself and Eleanor, as his presence would not be otherwise than displeasing to the latter.

"Yes—I will return presently," said the Prince,—"if I am assured that I shall not become the focus for your angry looks."

"Would you have me very amiable towards you?" demanded Mrs. Fitzherbert, in a tone of bitter irony. "Oh! you deserve it—"

"Perdition!—begone—leave me!" ejaculated his Royal Highness: and retreating, in a towering rage, into the bed-chamber, he slammed the door violently.

"Come, dear Lady Desborough," said Mrs. Fitzherbert, exercising wonderful command over her feelings: "we must saunter back to the ball rooms with countenances as serene and smiling as if nothing unusual had occurred. It may be that some of my friends have been to seek me in my own apartments—and we will therefore say, if questioned, that we have visited the picture-gallery. By the bye, that young lady whom you introduced this evening is a sweet pretty creature," observed Mrs. Fitzherbert, casting a rapid and searching glance at Eleanor's countenance, in order to ascertain if there had been any particular motive in presenting Pauline Clarendon to the Prince.

"She is not only beautiful—but as amiable, and virtuous as she is lovely," said the Countess. "In a few weeks she will become Lady Florimel."

"So much the better," thought Mrs. Fitzherbert "for the Prince was certainly struck with her."

But she did not breathe these sentiments aloud:—and now the two ladies once more entered the glittering sphere of beauty, rank, and fashion.

Mrs. Fitzherbert's intimate knowledge of the Prince's disposition enabled her to judge that he would not return to the ball-rooms again that night,—but, that he would retire to his own apartments and drown his dis-

appointment, rage, and humiliation in the bottle or the punch-bowl: she accordingly spread the report that his Royal Highness had been seized with a sudden indisposition; and the entertainment therefore broke up at an earlier hour than it would otherwise have done.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

A STRANGE VISITRESS.—A WELCOME

PROPOSAL.

THE scene now changes to Mrs. Clarendon's house in Cavendish Square.

It was about half-past ten o'clock in the morning—breakfast was over—and the father, leaving his two lovely daughters in the parlour, retired to a room which had been fitted up as his library or study.

Mr. Clarendon's countenance has already been described as thin, sallow, and having an indelible stamp of melancholy traced upon its lineaments: but it now appeared actually careworn and expressed all the indications of mind in at ease. Nevertheless, in the presence of his daughters he assumed a certain appearance of gaiety—or rather of composure and tranquillity—which lead them to believe that he had naught to vex or annoy him;—and it was only when alone that his features fell, as it were, into an aspect mournfully harmonizing with the real state of his thoughts.

Thus was it on the morning of which we are writing, and which was the one following the grand entertainment at Carlton House:—for, having chatted at the breakfast-table with his daughters in a manner that might be termed almost cheerful, he retired to his library to give way to the most melancholy reflections.

Indeed, Mrs. Brace, the wily milliner of Pall Mall, had not been misled by her wordly experience when she conjectured—without ever having seen Mr. Clarendon in her life—that he felt his present position to be altogether a false one.

And such indeed it was: for he had only been acknowledged as a relative and well treated by Lord Marchmont at a time when circumstances seemed to proclaim him as the heir to the old peerage and the fine estates which

were the appanage of that rank;—but now that the Hon. Arthur Eaton was completely recovered from his perilous and mysterious malady, it had already struck Mr. Clarendon that Lord Marchmont was growing colder towards him each time they met. True it was that Arthur's manner became more friendly and cordial, if possible, every day—and he *was* almost a diurnal visitor at the house in Cavendish Square: but still the young gentleman's amiability recompensed not Mr. Clarendon for the old lord's increasing indifference.

What, then, was to be done? To return to his cottage and his comparative penury, was an idea too galling for Mr. Clarendon to entertain for many minutes at a time—although there were occasions when he *did* contemplate it seriously, considering it to be preferable to the painful alternative of living as it were upon a species of eleemosynary charity—or at all events, in an utter dependence on his haughty relative. But, no—he could not calmly and deliberately consent to abandon the improved position in which circumstances had placed him after so long and severe a struggle with the world. Besides, was not Pauline engaged to marry a young peer of immense wealth?—and might not Octavia hope to form an equally brilliant match?

So at least Mr. Clarendon thought: and looking upon the world and all its denizens with that distrust which a long series of misfortunes, invariably engenders in the human mind, he feared lest his daughters' prospects should be ruined were his own position in society to undergo any alteration for the worst. He knew not that Florimel, for instance, had loved Pauline when she was an obscure, humble, and unknown maiden, or that he now loved her for her own sake alone: on the contrary, he fancied that if Pauline were to return to the Villa in the Edgeware Road and lay aside her silk dress to resume a cotton one, she would not then appear sufficiently beautiful in the young nobleman's eyes to compensate for her own want of fortune and the penury of her sire.

These considerations, therefore, induced Mr. Clarendon to cling to the position in which Lord Marchmont had so suddenly, and under such peculiar circumstances, placed him: but still he left that it was a position not only false and embarrassing, but even cruel. For the allowance of a

thousand a-year might be withdrawn by Lord Marchmont in any moment of caprice; and even if it were continued until this old nobleman's death, there might be no stipulation in his will to ensure its subsequent payment. True it was that Arthur Eaton appeared to have conceived a great attachment towards the Clarendon family; but he was young—he might marry, and thus bestow his sympathies elsewhere—or a thousand other circumstances might tend to induce him to stop the pecuniary allowance now made.

All these considerations were perplexing and vexatious enough: but even that did not constitute the sum of Mr. Clarendon's painful reflections. For was it a small thing that a peerage should have been snatched, as it were, from his very grasp?—was it a trifling matter that a coronet should have descended to within an inch of his brow and then have been suddenly withdrawn? Yet such was the fact:—a few weeks back—and Arthur Eaton appeared to hover on the very verge of the grave. Death seemed to hold him in his grasp—and thus the frail-est, weakest barrier in the world alone stood between Mr. Clarendon and the heirship-apparent to the Marchmont title and estates.

But how speedily was the aspect of circumstances changed! Death released its hold upon the victim who seemed past all human redemption; and Arthur Eaton was rapidly returning to a new and vigorous state of existence. Mr. Clarendon's hopes, at one time so brilliant, were thus doomed to experience a terrible annihilation:—and it was not without the bitterest pangs and the most intense secret anguish that this man, naturally ambitious and of an aristocratic mind, beheld the downfall of that glorious fabric which circumstances had justified his imagination in building up.

Upon retiring to his library on the morning whereof we are now writing, Mr. Clarendon fell into the train of thoughts which we have just sketched:—and in this painful reverie had he been wrapt for nearly half-an-hour, when a domestic entered to announce that a lady, who refused to give her name, desired an immediate interview with him.

He ordered the servant to show the visitress into the library; and when she made her appearance, he was immediately struck by the mingled elegance, dignity, and grace which

characterised her form: but her countenance Mr. Clarendon could not see—for it was carefully concealed by a thick black veil so folded as to render it impossible to catch a glimpse of the features through the transparency of the lace.

That she was young, he had not the slightest doubt—for her figure possessed all the symmetry of youthfulness: the waist was very slender—the shoulders had a fine width and an admirable slope—the bust was well-formed without being exuberant—and she walked with that lightness yet firmness of step which finely proportioned limbs can alone command. Besides, her feet and ankles, peeping beneath her dark silk dress, were small even to a fault—and the hands, though imprisoned in black kid gloves, were evidently modelled with a corresponding delicacy and perfection.

Mr. Clarendon placed a chair for her accommodation; and, resuming his own seat, he waited with no inconsiderable degree of curiosity for the first words that should fall from her lips.

"Scarcely knowing how to introduce the object of my visit, Mr. Clarendon," said the veiled lady, in a voice rich with all the soft melody and beautiful with all the harmonious freshness of youth,—"I must commence by apologising for this intrusion. But you will pardon me if I neither reveal my name nor raise my veil upon the present occasion. Indeed, my business with you is full of mystery—"

"But of what nature is that business, Miss—or Madam—for I know not by which distinction to address you," interrupted Mr. Clarendon, not altogether liking the opening scene in this strange interview.

"Call me *Miss*, if you will," said the lady. "And do not," she immediately exclaimed "imbibe any hasty notion to my prejudice, on account of the mystery with which it at present suits me to envelope myself. It may be that we shall become far more intimately connected: on the other hand it may be that we shall part presently—never to meet again."

"And on what do these alternatives depend?" inquired Mr. Clarendon, a strange and unaccountable feeling coming over him,—a feeling made up of something more than mingled surprise, curiosity, and suspense—one of those 'mystic' and superhuman sensations, in fine, which visit us but

once or twice during our lives, but which, when they *do* shed their influence over us, seem to warn us that we have reached some point or crisis in our destiny which will decide the whole current and channel of the future flow of existence.

"You ask on what those alternatives depend?" repeated the veiled lady: and Mr. Clarendon knew by her attitude and manner that she was fixing her eyes upon him searchingly through her veil. "They depend solely on yourself," she added, after a pause of nearly a minute.

"Madam, allow me to tell you frankly that the mystery which you are adopting begins to be irksome and embarrassing to me," said Mr. Clarendon. "If you wish to speak to me on some private matter, I will pledge my word most sacredly and my honour most solemnly to look upon the communication as confidential and secret."

"And if that communication were of a startling character?" said the lady, in a tone of inquiry.

"These are times when it requires a great deal to startle anybody," responded Mr. Clarendon.

"Am I to understand that *your* experience of the world is such as to render it difficult either to startle or shock you?" demanded the mysterious unknown.

"I need not hesitate to answer you in the affirmative," said Mr. Clarendon, who failed not to comprehend that his visitress was seeking for encouragement to proceed. "Yes—acquaintance with the world is not of the most pleasant description; and I have seen enough to convince me that heartlessness and selfishness thrive the best, while generosity and honour fall lamentably into the background. I like Generosity to a man who commits slow suicide by means of infinitesimal doses of poison, which however must prove eventually fatal: for Generosity ruins and destroys itself, to reap nothing but ingratitude. As for Honour—it's a mere word," added Mr. Clarendon, with intense bitterness, "which every man and every class of men interpret differently."

"Ah! now I begin to understand you better—and I am glad that you have made these observations, said the lady. "You have evidently been taught by experience to look upon the world as the arena in which selfish interests wage a more terrible conflict than that

of the Roman gladiators. And you are right, Mr. Clarendon. But, having adopted these views, you would doubtless feel grateful to any one who might point out the means of ameliorating your own condition?"

"By heaven! I would worship such a friend as if it were an angel sent from heaven!" ejaculated Mr. Clarendon: then, almost repenting of the enthusiasm into which his feelings had at the moment betrayed him, he said in a different and colder tone, "But wherefore do you put such strange questions to me? If you know aught of my circumstances——"

"I know everything!" interrupted the veiled visitress. "I am well acquainted with all the details of your position—and I am convinced, after the admissions you have already made, that it is painful and intolerable to a degree."

"But it may be dangerous for me to make farther admissions to you, lady!" suddenly exclaimed Mr. Clarendon, fearful that he had been guilty of some imprudence in expressing with such freedom his ideas of the world and the views resulting from his experience of it. "Before we continue a discourse which has taken so strange a turn, permit me to inquire who you are?"

"I have already warned you that it will neither suit my purposes to reveal my name or raise my veil upon the present occasion," said the lady, in a firm and decisive tone. "Indeed, our interview may as well end here," she added, rising abruptly from her seat: then, again appearing to scan Mr. Clarendon's features with an earnest attention through her closely folded veil, she observed in a low, solemn, and mysterious tone, "That you are discontented, I perceive: but whether you have the courage to undertake the work which can alone place you on that eminence to which your ambition aspires, I am unable at present to judge. If you do indeed possess that courage, I am willing to aid you upon certain conditions. Therefore, whether we shall meet again must depend upon yourself. For the remainder of this week, and throughout the next shall I each morning look into the *Times* newspaper: if no communication be made to me through its advertising columns I shall conclude that you are a mere grumbler who dares not act—a poltroon who can complain but who lacks the energy necessary to improve his condition—and accomplish his

desires. On the other hand, if a communication should appear in that journal, addressed to the '*Veiled Lady*', it will instantaneously be attended to. Farewell."

And, with this abrupt peroration, the mysterious visitress quitted the room, leaving Mr. Clarendon so completely a prey to the profoundest amazement that he remained fixed as it were in his chair, unable to rise and perform the usual courteous ceremony of opening the door of the apartment or ringing the bell for a domestic to attend upon her egress from the house.

By degrees Mr. Clarendon recovered from the stupor of surprise and bewilderment into which he had been thrown by the closing scene of that strange interview; and he then began to reflect with an intense and absorbing interest on everything which had fallen from the lady's lips. He passed in review all the details of her remarks—he weighed her words with a minute carefulness—he considered all the possible bearings and every probable tendency which they might have. It was not difficult to perceive that she was well acquainted with his position; and she had also managed to probe the nature of his secret thoughts to no mean depth.

But who was she?—and what assistance could she possibly lend Mr. Clarendon in order to raise him to that eminence to which his ambition aspired? For in order to gratify that ambition, the coronet of a peer must be placed upon his brow: and who was this lady that could render him an aid so efficient as to reach so grand a consummation?

Unable to form even the remotest or wildest conjecture in this respect, Mr. Clarendon was relapsing into that bewilderment of the ideas from which he had just managed to emerge,—when the door opened and the Hon. Mr. Eaton was announced.

Wonderful was the change which had recently taken place in this young gentleman. The ruddy glow of health was upon his cheeks: his eyes had lost all their wild and feverish brilliancy, and shone with a natural lustre;—his lips were of a wholesome red;—and his figure, though modelled in slight proportions, had lost its attenuation, debility, and appearance of caducity. Instead of the worn-out and emaciated being he had so lately seemed, he was now a fine young man—remarkably

handsome, and possessed of every personal attraction calculated to touch the female heart, as he was also endowed with every mental quality to enable him to win and retain it.

"Mr. Clarendon," said Arthur, when the usual complimentary greetings were exchanged, "I have paid my respects to you in the first instance this morning, because I am anxious to have a few moments' conversation with you before I join my fair cousins. The truth is," continued the Hon. Mr. Eaton, his countenance assuming a certain seriousness, though not of an expression which heralded any bad tidings,—“the truth is, I wish to put one candid question to you in the hope of receiving as frank a reply.

"Proceed, my dear Arthur," said Mr. Clarendon, somewhat amazed at the singularity of this prefatory observation: "I am convinced you cannot for an instant suppose that any frankness on your part will be met otherwise than with a congenial ingenuousness on mine.

"Oh! assuredly not, my dear sir!" exclaimed Eaton, whose voice of rich masculine melody contrasted strangely with the weak and enfeebled tones in which he had so recently been wont to speak, when labouring under the fatal effects of the slow poison, *alias* the Heir's Friend. But you are well aware," he continued, "that when a person wishes to enter upon a delicate and confidential subject, he prefaces it with some precautionary remarks which are nevertheless in most instances unnecessary and uncalled for."

"And you are desirous of speaking to me on a delicate and confidential subject?" said Mr. Clarendon, wondering what on earth could be the topic thus mysteriously alluded to.

"Yes: are you surprised?" demanded Arthur, with a smile. "But not to keep you any longer in suspense, my dear Mr. Clarendon, I will at once frankly inform you that it is respecting your elder daughter, the charming Octavia—"

Ah!" ejaculated Mr. Clarendon, his countenance lighting up with a satisfaction which he could not conceal for it instantaneously struck him that Arthur Eaton was about to demand Octavia's hand in marriage—and, with the rapidity of lightning, did his thoughts calculate all the advantages of such a connexion,—advantages, indeed, which would go far towards putting an end to that falseness of

position in which Mr. Clarendon was situated with regard to the Marchmont family.

"In one word, then, my dear sir," resumed Arthur, after a moment's pause,—“do you believe that Miss Clarendon's affections are disengaged?"

"Certainly!—most assuredly!" exclaimed Mr. Clarendon, not for an instant deeming it possible that his daughter could be in love without his knowing it. "I acquainted you yesterday with the pleasing intelligence that Lord Florimel had on the previous day formally demanded my permission to pay his addresses to Pauline but Octavia is as yet 'fancy free,' as Shakspeare terms the virginity of the affections," added Mr. Clarendon, little suspecting how tremendously he erred in his belief and how completely he was deceived in that respect,

"You are certain that Octavia has formed no preference amongst the circle of her acquaintance?" said Arthur Eaton, inquiringly.

"I feel convinced that she has not," responded Mr. Clarendon, really believing what he was saying. But wherefore have you asked me the same question *twice*?"

"Simply because I would guard myself against proceeding in error or misconception," answered the young gentleman. "There have been moments—especially lately—when it has struck me that Octavia was pensive—thoughtful—"

"I can assure you that I have noticed nothing of the kind," interrupted Mr. Clarendon, emphatically: "and even if she do seem pre-occupied now and then, I will stake my existence it is not in consequence of any attachment secretly formed. Oh! no—she would conceal nothing from me—"

"As her father, you must decidedly know best," said Arthur. "Taking it for granted, then, that Miss Clarendon's affections are disengaged," he continued, in a tone of manly firmness, "I demand your permission to seek an interview with her for the purpose of offering her my hand."

"My dear Arthur," exclaimed Mr. Clarendon, his sallow countenance becoming radiant with joy, "I am delighted—nay, so overcome by this unlooked-for—this unexpected happiness—that I am at a loss for words to convey all I feel—"

"Then I have your permission," interrupted the young gentleman, press-

ing his relative's hands with cordial warmth: "and I shall hasten to avail myself of it!"

"Go, dear Arthur—go!" cried Mr. Clarendon, almost pushing him towards the door of the library, "you will find your cousins in the parlour—and Octavia will feel herself honoured and happy in the preference which you thus manifest in her favour, when the fashionable world abounds in heiresses amongst whom you might select and choose at will."

But the latter portion of this sentence was lost upon Arthur Eaton, who, anxious to perform what he considered to be *a duty*, was already crossing the threshold of the library on his way to the parlour.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE SISTERS.

When breakfast was over on the morning of which we are writing,—and when Mr. Clarendon had left his daughters together, as already described at the commencement of the preceding chapter,—Pauline took her sister's hand and gazed so long and with a look so full of tenderness upon her countenance, that the latter suddenly felt assured either that something was amiss or that a revelation of importance was about to be made.

"My dearest Pauline," she exclaimed, "there is a peculiarity in your manner this morning.—"

"Which alarms you, Octavia?" interrupted the younger sister, finishing the other's sentence for her. "But tranquillise yourself—"

"Ah! then you have some evil tidings to communicate, Pauline?" suddenly ejaculated Octavia, the colour disappearing from her cheeks. "Is it concerning yourself—or relative to me, my beloved sister? Speak—oh! speak quickly—and keep me not in suspense!"

"Hush!—not so loud!—we may be overheard," said Pauline, endeavouring to calm her sister's excitement: then, placing herself by Octavia's side, she murmured in a tremulous tone, and taking her hand, "it almost breaks my heart to have anything disagreeable to unfold to you—"

"My God! what do you mean?" demanded the elder Miss Clarendon, her anxiety and suspense now becoming

utterly intolerable. "Oh! you are weeping, Pauline—you are weeping!" she exclaimed, throwing a look of wild excitement upon her sister: "the tears are raining down your cheeks—and it is for me that they fall! Tell me—tell me, dear Pauline—what has happened?"

"I conjure you to tranquillise yourself, Octavia," said Pauline, embracing her sister tenderly. "You know how devotedly I love you—how much I would undergo to save you a single pang—"

"And it is the same with me, Pauline," interrupted Octavia. "Feeling our motherless condition, we have ever loved each other with the fondest and most tender affection; and it is now by this affection—by this love, Pauline, that I conjure you to relieve me from suspense—"

"I will—I will," exclaimed the younger sister, whose cheeks were flushed with grief, as those of Octavia were pale with apprehension. "You believed that I went to the Opera last night: and it was not so,

"Then whither did you go?" inquired Octavia, amazement for an instant absorbing the intensity of her excitement; and she fixed her magnificent blue eyes upon Pauline's countenance.

"There was a grand entertainment at Carlton House last evening," began the younger Miss Clarendon; and—

"And you obtained an introduction thither?" exclaimed Octavia, a terrible tremor now coming over her, at the same time that an awful suspicion of the truth swept upon her startled soul.

"Yes—I went to Carlton House," continued Pauline: determined to clear up the dreadful mystery—And, Oh! my beloved sister—my wronged, lost, betrayed Octavia—"

But, suffocated by her grief Pauline stopped short; and, throwing herself upon her sister's neck, she wept convulsively.

"I understand it all—My God! I understand it all!" murmured Octavia, falling back upon the sofa, with her affectionate and kind-hearted sister clinging to her in the wildest paroxysm of grief.

A minute passed—and no sound fell from Octavia's lips: motionless likewise was she.

As the searing lightning darts vivid and sudden through the night of storm and rain, and tempest—so, amidst the tumultuous anguish of Pauline's heart

did the blasting thought that Octavia was dead flash across her imagination.

Starting from the convulsive embrace in which she was holding her sister,—starting thence, we say, as if suddenly impelled away by an irresistible galvanic shock,—Pauline threw a terrified look on Octavia's countenance.

The unhappy young lady was not dead—nor even in a swoon: but she was stunned—stupefied—paralysed by the weight of ineffable misery.

Spell-bound, as if under the incantation of some hellish spirit, was she!

And all in a moment she had passed through the most torturing phase of her existence—she had endured the crucifixion of that indescribable anguish which accompanies the sudden annihilation of the heart's fondest hopes—and she had as rapidly sunk into that species of stupor which is a palsy alike of the heart and of the brain!

Her eyes glared vacantly—her mouth was half-open—her bosom stood upheaved with the suspended breath.

"Octavia—my sister—my beloved sister!" exclaimed Pauline, wildly: in the name of God, speak to me."

These words, uttered with all the passionate enthusiasm of the young maiden's fervent love and rending grief, seemed suddenly to break that spell which held Octavia in a waking, statue-like trance.

Deep sighs of returning breath broke from her, convulsing her bosom fearfully; and as the blood flowed black into the veins, the excruciating sense of bitter, bitter anguish returned to the heart. Then the eyes, like two arteries of the soul suddenly opening, poured forth their pearly torrents; and the pent-up agonies of Octavia's tremendous affliction found a vent affording that relief which ever follows tears, even in the midst of the direst woe that the human breast can possibly experience.

And Pauline suffered her to weep uninterruptedly for many minutes.

"I need not ask you to describe in words the terrible truth which my heart's worst fears have already made me comprehend, alas! too well," said the wretched Octavia, at length breaking the silence which prevailed: and, raising her tear-bedewed countenance towards Pauline's, she added, in a low and scarcely audible tone, "I should have been better prepared for this cruel blow!"

"Yes, my beloved sister," answered Pauline: "for I know that you have recently experienced many sad misgivings and painful forebodings—"

"But it is so hard to abandon those delicious hopes which are indeed necessary to one's existence," exclaimed Octavia, in a voice fraught with the terrible accents of despair.

"Remember, my dearest sister," said Pauline, her tone suddenly becoming hoarse, thick, and almost ferocious,—*"remember,"* she repeated, more emphatically than at first, "that the Prince of Wales is now undeserving your love. But if you should still feel that your heart clings to his image—"

"My God! how can I ever efface that image from my soul?" exclaimed Octavia, now gazing in astonishment upon Pauline. "What, my dear sister,—do you suppose that I can pluck forth this love of mine from my heart,—as if it were a flower which *his* faithless hand had placed in my bosom,—and trample it under foot? Oh! no—no: it were impossible! Look into the depths of your own soul, Pauline—consider well the nature of that affection which you bear for Gabriel—and then tell me whether it is something which you can break like glass, snap like a twig or crush like a delicate rosebud."

"No—no—it is not," murmured Pauline, her voice becoming soft and tremulous again: "and I was wrong—or rather foolish—to hope for an instant that you could so easily triumph over your heart's fondest affections. But, tell me, my dear sister—tell me how you mean to act—"

"Did you speak to—to—*him* last night?" inquired Octavia, in a stifling voice.

"Yes—and he offered to make any reparation which lay in his power," responded Pauline.

"What reparation can he make?" exclaimed Octavia bitterly. "he found my heart a temple prepared for the holiest, sincerest, most impassioned worship which ever constituted the love that woman bears for man—and he has left that heart a ruin! Oh! my beloved sister, counsel—advise—instruct me: for I have no friend on earth in whom I can confide save thou!"

And, with tears again streaming from her eyes, Octavia threw herself upon the bosom of Pauline.

"I know not what course to recommend—My God! I am as much bewil-

dered as yourself," exclaimed the latter, as she clasped her unhappy sister in an embrace which love and grief rendered convulsively passionate.

"But does he love me?—or has his affection subsided?" asked Octavia, slowly raising her head and looking intently upon Pauline's countenance. "Oh! you do not answer me—you avert your eyes—and your manner convinces me that even his very love is dead!"

"No—no, Octavia," exclaimed Pauline, emphatically,—"I do not mean you to understand *that*! But if his affection for you be ever so strong, you cannot enjoy it in honour to yourself! Ah! it was *this*—it was *this* that was uppermost in my mind when I averted my looks and dared not answer you. For listen to me attentively, my well-beloved sister," continued the young lady, wiping her eyes and summoning all her mental energies to her aid.

"Speak—speak," murmured Octavia. "I feel as if *you* were the elder sister—or as if you were a mother to me: for this cruel blow has sadly changed me within the last quarter of an hour! Speak, then, my dearest Pauline—and your words will console and strengthen me."

"In the first place, Octavia," said the younger Miss Clarendon. "It is absolutely necessary that you should exercise immense control over your feelings. To this point you must tutor yourself at once—without delay. Our father may return to the room—visitors may be announced unexpectedly—and the strangest suspicions would be excited were we found sad, and weeping and afflicted thus sorely. Courage, then—dear sister—courage!" exclaimed Pauline; "and nerve yourself to look this tremendous misfortune in the face—to contemplate it with as much calmness as you can call to your aid—to examine it in all its bearings—to study all its tendencies—and to arrive at some settled opinion how to act."

"Yes—yes: I will be calm—I will be tranquil," murmured Octavia, sobbing profoundly between the broken assurances which she thus gave her sister. "But my God! the calamity is dreadful, Pauline—dear Pauline; and I know not whether it will end in suicide or madness!"

"O heavens! talk not thus wildly, my beloved Octavia!" exclaimed the younger Miss Clarendon, embracing her sister and lavishing upon her the most endearing caresses. "Come—let

us converse seriously—quietly—calmly—"

"But have you anything to suggest?" demanded Octavia, hastily—a ray of hope flashing in upon her soul.

"Alas! I am myself almost bewildered," said Pauline. "And yet there are two alternatives for an injured woman to choose between in your case."

"Two alternatives!" exclaimed Octavia. "Oh! yes," she added bitterly;—"I have already mentioned them—madness or suicide!"

"Sister, you will distract me—you will render me unfit to counsel or console you!" cried Pauline. "In the name of God, Octavia," she exclaimed, throwing her arms round the unhappy young lady's neck, "do not talk thus—but fulfil your promise——"

"What promise did I make?" inquired Octavia, impatiently.

"That you would be calm and tranquil—that you would listen to me with attention," said Pauline, in the most endearing tone. "Were we not talking just now of the love which we bear for each other——"

"Yes, dearest Pauline—and I am wrong, very wrong to say anything to distress you," interrupted Octavia, returning her sister's caresses. "Now, Pauline, I am calm—indeed I am; I will listen to you with attention, my dear good sister. You were telling me that there are two alternatives for my contemplation. I can see none. My brain whirls—I am bewildered!"

And she laid her head upon Pauline's shoulder.

"Rest yourself there, my beloved sister," said the young lady; "and listen while I explain myself to you. Do not interrupt me—but hear me to the end and I will speak slowly that you may follow me easily and readily as I proceed—for I can well understand, my poor Octavia, that this blow has fallen with tremendous weight upon your brain. I was saying, then, that there are two alternatives for you to contemplate. The first is to seek redress at the hands of the Prince of Wales—the second is to devour your grief in secret. You may ask me what reparation he can make you, otherwise than by leading you to the altar: I answer emphatically that he can be forced to espouse you!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Octavia, starting up as if obedient to the sudden influence of a galvanic battery: then clasping her hands together, she cried, "No—no, my beloved sister: you are

deceiving yourself—and you are deceiving me:—for did you not just now declare that, even if his affection were still mine, I could not enjoy it in honour to myself.”

“Yes—I spoke thus—in haste—and without remembering at the instant that there was a possibility of adopting ulterior means?” said Pauline. “Besides—I was anxious to probe all the varied feelings of your mind——”

“But you have spoken of ulterior means? interrupted Octavia: “Oh! tell me—keep me not in suspense, dear sister—those means——And yet,” she exclaimed, frantically interrupting herself and dashing her open palms wildly against her polished brow; it were madness to entertain such a hope?”

“Not so foolish as you conceive, Octavia,” answered Pauline, in a tone of partial triumph. “A secret of the utmost importance is in my keeping—a secret which only became known to me on Sunday last, while I was out walking with Gabriel during your absence at church——”

“And that secret?” exclaimed Octavia anxiously.

“Involves the honour of a lady of the highest rank——”

“But it will not save my honour, Pauline,” interrupted the elder sister, bitterly. “Oh! what in the name of heaven has all this to do with my unhappy case?” she demanded, gazing in astonishment upon Pauline. “What do you mean?”

“I mean that the lady who became a mother at our recent abode, under such mysterious circumstances——”

“Mrs. Mordaunt!” cried Octavia, literally trembling with impatience.

“Yes—Mrs. Mordaunt,” repeated Pauline. “And can you guess who this Mrs. Mordaunt really is?”

“How can I, Pauline?” exclaimed the elder sister. “But you remember that we always suspected her to be some lady of rank—and her friend Mrs. Smith, too——”

“Nor were we wrong in our conjectures, Octavia,” proceeded the younger Miss Clarendon, solemnly: for—as sure as I am now addressing my words to you—that Mrs. Smith was the high-born, wealthy, and fashionable Countess of Desborough—and Mrs. Mordaunt was her Royal Highness the Princess Sophia!”

Great heavens! is this possible?” exclaimed Octavia, almost forgetting her own afflictions in the absorbing interest of this tremendous revelation.

“It is not only possible—it is the truth,” said Pauline. “I have been introduced to her Royal Highness—and there is no doubt of her identity with our Mrs. Mordaunt. Besides,” continued Pauline, “when in conversation with the Prince of Wales relative to yourself, I was anxious to ascertain whether *he* was acquainted with his sister’s frailty—for at the moment I was breathing vague threats into his ear: and the few words which I let drop produced an effect upon him as if a vertigo had suddenly seized on his brain. Then—later in the evening—he asked me, in a tone full of deep meaning whether Lord Florimel was acquainted with the Princess Sophia’s adventure in the Edgeware Road——”

“Yes—yes—I recollect it well!” exclaimed Octavia, a sudden reminiscence flashing in upon her brain: “it was from my lips that the Prince of Wales learnt the dishonour of his own sister! He questioned me so closely—he forced me to reveal all that had occurred at the villa in connexion with the supposed Mrs. Mordaunt and Mrs. Smith—and now I remember that there was something strange and unaccountable in his manner at the time!”

“Oh! was it not a species of retribution that he should thus have received the intelligence of his sister’s shame from the lips of one whom he himself had dishonoured?” whispered Pauline in a low and solemn tone. “But you now perceive, my beloved sister, how it is possible that this haughty Prince can be made to fall on his knees before you and consent to any sacrifice which you may dictate as the price of secrecy respecting the Princess?”

“My God! I dare not employ menaces, Pauline!” exclaimed Octavia, wringing her hands hysterically. “I have loved him too well—still love him too tenderly——And yet,” she cried, suddenly interrupting herself, “why should I spare him, since he hesitates not to break my heart?—why should I release him from his vows, if it be indeed within my power to enforce their fulfilment?”

“It is a matter of such vital importance, Octavia,” said Pauline, “that you must deliberate on it with far more composure and tranquillity than you can now bring to bear upon the question. Let us cease to speak thereon for the present—and, in the name of everything sacred! study, to exercise a control over your feelings.

"I may say that the bitterness of death is past," observed poor Octavia, with difficulty subduing a profound sob. "The worst is now known—the most terrible paroxysm of grief is over—and I must endeavour——"

And scarcely had she time to wipe away the traces of her tears and smooth her charming auburn hair, when the door opened, and the Hon. Arthur Eaton made his appearance.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE PROPOSAL.

"MY sweet cousins," exclaimed the young gentleman, observing that they both started and even exhibited signs of confusion and embarrassment, "if I interrupt you in any very serious discourse, I will at once retire. But really," he added smiling. "I am at a loss to conceive what you can have to render you both so demure——"

"Nay—come in, Arthur," said Pauline. "You surely are not upon such ceremonial terms with us as to remain standing on the threshold until we invite you to enter."

"On the contrary, my dear cousin," returned Mr. Eaton, "I consider myself on so intimate and friendly a footing in this house, that I at once and unhesitatingly avow my desire to have a few minutes' conversation with your sister in private."

"With me!" ejaculated the elder Miss Clarendon, in amazement.

"Assuredly," answered the young gentleman with a smile "since Pauline has no other sister, I must of course mean you."

"And what can you possibly have to say to me in private, Arthur?" exclaimed Octavia her colour coming and going in rapid alternations, as a thousand conflicting thoughts and fears swept through her mind.

"Nothing very formidable," was the response. "Now my dear Pauline, I am certain you will gratify my request by leaving me *tete-a-tete* with your sister."

"Oh! certainly—since you are really serious—which I did not think you were at first," exclaimed Pauline: and, darting a look full of kind encouragement upon her sister, she hurried from the room.

"In the name of heaven! what means all this mystery, Arthur?" demanded Octavia, the moment the door closed behind Pauline.

"You are agitated—trembling from head to foot—apparently overwhelmed with some secret grief, Octavia!" exclaimed the young gentleman, heedless of her question—for he was suddenly struck by her excited manner, her changing cheeks, her rapid utterance, and her wild looks. "Tell me—has anything occurred to vex or annoy you?—for you surely can make a confidant of one who feels so deep an interest in your welfare as I."

"No—no—I am not agitated now," said Octavia, exerting all her power and all her strength to regain her self-possession. "I was only startled by the suddenness with which you demanded a private interview—I was fearful that something had happened—to my father perhaps—But I am composed and tranquil now, Arthur," she added, smiling faintly.

"I am afraid that you are only assuming a tranquillity which you do not in reality experience, Octavia," said the young gentleman, in a tone of deep and touching kindness. "However, I will not seek to penetrate into your feelings: perhaps the communication which I am about to make will induce you of your own accord to treat me with full confidence. Come, let us sit down, Octavia, and have five minutes' serious conversation together."

"Thus speaking, he conducted her to the sofa: then taking a chair near her, he gazed upon her attentively for a few minutes,

"To what is all this to lead?" demanded Octavia, experiencing a vague and unknown terror, and little divining the turn which the conversation was so speedily to take: but she felt, whilst she cast down her blushing face beneath the steadfast yet kind looks of her youthful relative, as if he were acquainted with her secret and was about to proclaim to her ears his knowledge of her amour, her dishonour, and her affliction.

"You ask to what all this is to lead, Octavia," said Arthur, in a tone of gentle remonstrance, "as if my visit were an intrusion—as if my presence were unwelcome. Did I indeed interpret your words and manner in a sense so unaccountable on your part and so little flattering to myself, a seal would at once be placed upon my lips in respect to the communication which I am here to make."

"Pardon—forgive me Arthur," exclaimed Miss Clarendon, extending

her hand towards him: "I have been rude—unkind—eccentric——"

"Say no more upon the subject, Octavia," interrupted Arthur, pressing her fair hand for a moment, and then gently dropping it. "And now listen to me attentively, my fair cousin."

Octavia gazed upon him with more of curiosity and less of terror in her looks: for his words, tone, and manner were kind and reassuring in the extreme.

"You are well aware, my dear cousin," resumed Arthur, "that an unfortunate estrangement existed until lately between your branch of the family and mine. This breach—which, thank God! had nothing to do with either you or me—is now healed between our parents; and the two branches have become as it were one family. To speak, however, in a worldly sense—and I cannot very well avoid touching upon the point, delicate though it be,—your father would naturally be pleased to behold *his* branch of the family sharing in the honours and enjoying the fortune of the race with which he is connected. Moreover, I have reflected, my dear cousin, that an atonement is due from the branch to which I belong unto yours: and duty, inclination, propriety, and justice have prompted me to take the step which I am about to explain to you."

He paused for a few moments, and fixed his eyes upon Octavia's countenance to ascertain if she had begun to comprehend his meaning; but so troubled did her brain still feel, after that long and terrible conversation with Pauline, that it was unable to exercise the keenness of perception and the readiness of conjecture which it would have called into play under other circumstances. Thus, bewildered by the prefatory observations which had just been addressed to her, the young lady returned the earnest looks of the Hon. Arthur Eaton with a vacant gaze of surprise, uncertainty, and suspense.

"You do not understand me Octavia," he said, with a smile; and I see that I must be more explicit. In a word, I have received from your father not only the assurance that your affections are disengaged, but likewise his permission to offer you my hand."

"Arthur—you—you—know not what you say—what you do!" murmured Miss Clarendon, suddenly thrown completely off her guard by a communica-

tion which so vividly and painfully recalled to her memory the love which she cherished for the ingrate Prince: then, darting upon him a look of ineffable anguish, she covered her face with her hands, and, bursting into tears, gave free issue to the pent-up grief which had been swelling for the last few minutes in her bosom.

"My God! Octavia, what ails you?—what is the matter?" inquired Arthur, amazed as well as painfully afflicted by this unaccountable and heart-rending behaviour of the young lady. "If I have said aught to offend you, Octavia, I implore your forgiveness. I sought to render you happy, and not bring tears from your eyes. But perhaps you love another, and your affection is a secret? Oh! cherish that love, then, Octavia, and think not for a single moment that I would seek to wean you away from the object of such an attachment."

"Spare me, Arthur—spare me!" murmured Miss Clarendon her whole frame convulsing with an inexpressible grief. "Talk not to me of love——"

"Only one word more Octavia," interrupted Arthur: "and *that* I must say, for my own sake—for yours also! Learn, then, that much as I esteem you—deeply as I am interested in your welfare—I do not love you otherwise than as a relative, or as a friend loves a very dear friend. It was not, then, through the heart's tender affection that I demanded your hand, but purely from a sense of duty. My reasons for believing that there *was* a duty involved in this step I have already explained to you; and you can now comprehend my motives——"

"Oh! yes, I perceive that you are the most generous of men!" exclaimed Octavia, all the nobleness of her cousin's intentions and views now bursting upon her mind as a flood of light streams suddenly into a dark cave, illuminating all its recesses. "You would have become my husband in order to make me the sharer of your rank and fortune; so that when Lord Marchmont should be summoned to the tomb, my father might be consoled for the loss of a coronet by beholding it upon the brow of his daughter! Yes, yes, Arthur Eaton, I comprehend it all now: and again I thank you—Oh! how cordially I thank you for this unparalleled generosity. But it may not be, Arthur," she added, her voice suddenly dropping, and her look bending downward at the same time,

whilst a deep crimson glow suffused itself over her countenance: and her neck, even unto her bosom.

"You love another; then?" said the young man and, without waiting for a reply, he exclaimed, "God grant that you may be happy, Octavia?"

"Happy!" she repeated, with a sudden start: then, instantly composing herself, she said in a tone of deep and indescribable feeling: "I thank God, Arthur, that you do *not* love me: for had I an enemy deserving of my bitterest rancour, I would not wish that he should know what a hopeless attachment is."

"Ah!" ejaculated Eaton: "is it possible, my poor cousin, that your heart cherishes such a blighting love as this?"

"What have I said? what have I told you?" exclaimed Octavia, now perceiving that she had been hurried by her emotions to the vicinage of dangerous ground. "Do not question me any farther—do not persist in continuing the discourse upon this topic. I thank you, Arthur—most sincerely thank you—for the honour you have done me and the generosity which you have displayed towards my father and myself: but I beseech you not to press me for any additional explanation respecting the motive which compels me to decline your flattering proposal."

"Not for worlds, Octavia," exclaimed the young man, "would I say or do ought to give you pain. But, ere we take leave of this topic altogether, permit me to make one observation, which I hope you will treasure up in your memory."

"Speak, Arthur," said Miss Clarendon, growing more composed.

"It is that should you ever be placed in a position to require a friend, Octavia—a sincere friend; repeated the Hon. Arthur Eaton,—“a friend in whom you might wish to put even more trust than in a brother,—hesitate not to send for me, and my actions shall prove the sincerity with which I am now uttering these words.”

"Oh! the time may indeed come when I shall require such a friend as you," murmured Octavia, taking the young gentleman's hand and pressing it with all the cordial fervour of an intense gratitude. "Be assured I will not hesitate to address myself to you, Arthur, in such a case. But even now—at once—this moment," she exclaimed, a sudden thought striking

her—"I am about to demand a favour at your hands."

"You have only to name it, Octavia," said Arthur, who, perceiving that the beautiful creature was unhappy, experienced a profound compassion and a sincere sympathy in her behalf. "In what manner can I prove my friendship to you, dear cousin?" he inquired, seeing that she hesitated.

"I have confessed to you that I love another," she responded at length, while casting down her looks and blushing deeply: "but I do not wish that my father should learn this secret."

"Not from my lips shall Mr. Clarendon receive the slightest hint of the real motive which has led you to reject my proposal," returned Arthur, emphatically. "I will seek him at once—I will tell him that you and I have had a long and serious conversation together, and that we have mutually arrived at the conclusion that our happiness would not be ensured by any closer alliance than that of friendship."

"I thank you sincerely, my dear cousin," said the young lady, "for this fresh proof of your goodness and generosity towards me."

Arthur Eaton then took his leave of Octavia, and returned to the library where Mr. Clarendon was building fine castles in the air on the strength of the belief which he entertained that his daughter would cheerfully accept her cousin's proposal.

"Well, my dear Arthur," he exclaimed, the moment the young gentleman re-appeared in his presence; "I suppose that nothing remains but to fix the day——"

"Indeed, my dear sir," interrupted Eaton, assuming a serious air, "nought is settled; nor is there ought now to settle."

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. Clarendon, in amazement.

"I mean that Miss Octavia and myself have had a long and solemn discourse together," answered the Hon. Mr. Eaton, "and that we have decided upon remaining excellent friends——"

"She has refused you, Arthur!" ejaculated Mr. Clarendon, his lips growing cold and quivering with rage.

"Not so, my dear sir," returned the young gentleman: "or rather, we have refused each other. But, if there be any preponderating fault on one side, it is upon mine, and you must not therefore blame your daughter."

Having thus spoken, Arthur Eaton took his leave of Mr. Clarendon, who was scarcely able to conceal his vexation and disappointment until the door closed behind the young gentleman: and then, throwing himself back in his seat, he clutched the hair on each side of his head, muttering savagely between his teeth, "Miserable wretch that I am! was I not born to experience an incessant series of misfortunes?"

But suddenly the image of the veiled lady sprang up in his mind: and recovering his composure, he began to reflect profoundly once more upon all she had that morning said to him.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

THE HEIR-APPARENT AND HIS

FRIEND

While these scenes were taking place at Mr. Clarendon's abode in Cavendish Square, his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales awoke with a bad headache and in an execrable humour, in his sumptuous bed-chamber at Carlton House.

We have already described this apartment in the sixteenth chapter of our narrative, to which the reader may refer if he be in any way anxious to refresh his memory concerning the luxurious manner of its fittings and appointments.

Raising himself painfully in his couch, and giving vent to a bitter imprecation against the aching pangs which racked his head, the Prince sought relief in the cooling beverages afforded him by the table at his bedside; and when the draught of hock and soda-water had gone hissing down his parched throat, he threw himself back to enjoy the refreshing sensations which followed.

But though the pain in the head soon underwent a partial mitigation, the train of thoughts which gradually passed through the mind of the heir-apparent was of no pleasurable description.

Pauline had discovered his princely rank, and would of course communicate the circumstance to her sister. How Octavia would receive the terrible revelation,—whether she would be overwhelmed with grief or goaded to vengeance,—it was impossible to say.

But certain it was that the secret of the Princess Sophia's frailty was in the keeping of those two young ladies and his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales shuddered when he thought what use they might make of their knowledge of his sister's shame.

Even if he had nothing more than all this to vex him, it was quite enough. But there were other circumstances which forced themselves on his contemplation, in spite of his habitual anxiety to shut his mental eyes against all unpleasant objects.

In the first place, he had not only signally failed in his stratagem with regard to the Countess of Desborough but the incidents of the preceding evening had made her acquainted with a secret which so completely put him in her power that he would never again dare to spread the meshes or his intrigues at her feet. For she had learnt that Mrs. Fitzherbert was his own wedded wife; and that fact, breathed to the public, would endanger his accession to the throne, inasmuch as the lady whom he had thus espoused, in spite of the Royal Marriage Act, was a Roman Catholic!

Secondly, his Royal Highness had no doubt provoked the bitter indignation of Mrs. Fitzherbert by his conduct towards Lady Desborough; and he not only dreaded "a scene" with hismorganatic wife the next time he repaired into her presence, but he likewise trembled lest she should take it into her head to demand a full and complete recognition before the world, in order to escape in future the possibility of receiving such injurious imputations as Eleanor had in the first instance uttered against her during the memorable affair of the preceding evening.

All these matters were terribly perplexing to a Prince who hated even the trouble of thinking on anything save pleasure and enjoyment, and who was but little fitted by a life of sensuality and indulgence to grapple with a host of embarrassing circumstances. In fact, he could not bear to think for himself: and, knowing moreover that certain affairs had reached a crisis in which some resolute and definite step must be taken, he resolved to summon his universal friend to counsel and assist him.

Ringling the bell by means of the silken cord hanging between the curtains and the wall, he waited impati-

ently until the French valet, dressed with such nice precision in plain black, responded to the summons.

"Germain," said his Royal Highness, "send up immediately to Mr. Meagles' lodgings with a request that he will come to me as soon as possible."

The valet bowed and retired; and the Prince—fancying, with his natural indolence, that half of the necessary remedial measures were already accomplished in the mere fact of sending for the individual to whom their execution was to be entrusted—turned round and fell into a doze.

Then that high and mighty personage—the envied of all men,—the adored by all women,—the heir-apparent to the throne of England—snored as loudly, as coarsely, and as discordantly as any peasant: and moreover, this elegant and accomplished individual—this most polished gentleman in Europe—had gone to bed at two in the morning in the most beastly, helpless, and swinish state of intoxication!

O Royalty! how despicable wast thou then!

Well, George Prince of Wales enjoyed a comfortable snooze for nearly an hour, at the expiration of which time Mr. Meagles made his appearance; and the Royal Highness woke up.

"My dear Tim," he said, stretching forth his hand to grasp that of his friend, "come and sit down by the bed-side: for I am anxious to have a very serious conversation with you. Indeed, I have sundry revelations to make to you and divers commissions wherewith to entrust you."

"I am at your service, Prince," answered Meagles, taking a chair: then, lolling back in the seat and caressing his well-curled auburn whiskers, he said, "Between you and me, my illustrious friend, you look just for all the world as if you had been infernally drunk last night. And yet that could scarcely have been the case, seeing that you gave a grand ball."

"By Jove! but it was the case though, my dear fellow!" exclaimed the Prince. "I was what may be called royally drunk; and what is worse still, I got drunk by myself, through sheer vexation and annoyance."

"The devil you did!" cried Meagles. "Let us hear how that happened."

"Yes—I must touch slightly upon it," said the Prince, in a musing tone; "because it has reference to the

matters on which I am anxious to consult you. Well, you must know that at the early part of the evening Mrs. Fitzherbert took umbrage at something and left the ball-rooms. I sent after her to her own apartments, but she was nowhere to be found. However, it seems that she had retired to a spare bed-chamber not very far from the saloons; inasmuch as she suddenly made her appearance from behind the curtains in that chamber, when I and a lady who had been enticed thither by a well-contrived stratagem, were in the midst of a somewhat heated conversation together."

"What the deuce! did you meet the lady in the very same room to which Mrs. Fitzherbert had previously retired?" asked Meagles, to whom the explanation was not very clear.

"Just so," answered his Royal Highness.

"And now, my good friend," continued the heir-apparent, with some little degree of hesitation and embarrassment, "I am about to reveal to you precisely the same secret which Mrs. Fitzherbert in her rage proclaimed to the astonished ears of the lady in question. But this secret, my dear Tim," added the Prince, emphatically, "is safe with the lady—for she is a woman of honour—and it must be safe with *you* also."

"Fear nothing, Prince," exclaimed Meagles. "You know well enough that I am not likely to betray any confidence which you place in me."

"Oh! I'm perfectly assured of *that* Tim!" cried the Prince: then, sinking his voice to a low and solemn whisper, he said, "The secret which Mrs. Fitzherbert proclaimed last night and which I now reveal to you, is that we are married——"

"Married!" ejaculated Meagles, with well-affected astonishment; for he was already aware of the fact which the Prince of Wales was now confessing to him.

"Hush!" said the heir-apparent: such a secret ought scarcely to be breathed to the air! Yes, it is true, Tim, that in a moment of weakness—folly—madness—I know not what to call it—I accompanied Mrs. Fitzherbert to the altar. Dazzled by her beauty—burning to possess her—excited almost to a delirium by the winning arts and seductive wiles which she practised to ensnare me,—I took that fatal step, believing it to be the only means of obtaining admission to her

bed. However, the mischief is done, and cannot be undone: but you can well understand that it has placed me in a cruel dilemma, now that the King and the Ministers have determined to marry me to the German Princess."

"And in what manner can I assist you?" demanded Meagles, inwardly delighted to perceive that matters were now coming to a crisis in which his aid must inevitably be sought and full confidence reposed in him accordingly.

"I have been thinking seriously over my position," resumed the Prince; "and the only avenue of escape which I can discover out of a complete morass of difficulties is to assent to this marriage with Caroline of Brunswick. Stepped to my very eyes in debts—pestered by creditors whose dunning amounts to intolerable insolence—in constant danger of having my very carriage and horses seized by a rascally sheriff's officer every time I go out,—what course am I to adopt? I might bully my father in some respects, but I cannot bully the Ministers: and you know that Pitt and his party hate me as they do the very devil."

"Well, then, from all this I am to understand that your Royal Highness will marry the Princess Caroline of Brunswick?" said Meagles, interrogatively.

"Yes, provided I can in any way induce or compel Mrs. Fitzherbert to consent thereto," replied the Prince.

"By fair means I should think that you will never succeed," observed Meagles, drily.

"That is precisely the apprehension which I entertain," exclaimed the heir-apparent: then, after a brief pause, and in an embarrassed tone, he added, "And as to foul means, I know not what kind to adopt."

"But you *would* adopt them, if any were to be suggested?" said Meagles, in a quiet way.

"My position is so awkward—so embarrassing—so intolerable, Tim," answered the heir-apparent, in a subdued voice and with a significant look, "that I would do anything—yes, *anything*," he repeated, with marked emphasis, "to ameliorate it. In a word, if Mrs. Fitzherbert will not consent to this marriage which the King and Ministers have chalked out for me, I am a thoroughly lost, ruined, and degraded man."

"You would therefore bestow an

immense reward upon any one who should,—either by fair means or by foul,—induce or compel Mrs. Fitzherbert to yield that consent and agree to any rational arrangement which you may be enabled to make with regard to herself? I should observe," added Meagles, "that you would undertake to grant such reward on your accession to the throne?"

"By heaven, I should only be too happy!" exclaimed the Prince. "But is it possible, Tim, that you have any plan in your head—any scheme—"

"Well, I can't exactly say at present," interrupted Meagles. "I may however think of a project—"

"Ah! I knew you would give me some hope in this respect!" cried the Prince, chuckling at the idea of getting rid of Mrs. Fitzherbert; for remorse or compunction seldom if ever stayed the progress of this bad man's execrable selfishness. "What is your plan, Tim?" he demanded, impatiently: "what do you suggest?"

"Leave me a little time to consider," responded Meagles, who did not choose to avow at once that he possessed the means of coercing Mrs. Fitzherbert at will. "Have you any other matters to communicate to me?—because you may just as well make a clean breast of all your difficulties and embarrassments while you are about it, and then I may be enabled to judge of the best measures to put you clear, right, and straight again."

"Well I have something else to communicate," said the Prince. "The truth is, I have seduced a young lady—"

"The seduction of a young lady is the heading which must appear to many a chapter in your life, my dear Prince," interrupted Meagles. "But go on. You have seduced a young lady, and you are afraid of a row?"

"Precisely so," answered the heir-apparent. "The fair one is a certain Miss Clarendon—Octavia Clarendon—"

"Daughter of a gentleman who is in some way connected with Lord Marchmont?" said Meagles, inquiringly.

"The same," replied his Royal Highness. "Do you know him?"

"Only by name," was the response. "But is the affair difficult to manage?"

"You perceive, Tim, that the young lady belongs to a highly respectable family—"

"To an aristocratic family," interrupted Meagles; "and, therefore un-

less she be very proud of having been seduced by you—and unless her father and relations are also very proud that she should have become a Prince's mistress—this affair presents to our view a phase of no ordinary colour. For I am very certain that out of every hundred aristocratic families, ninety-nine would be charmed and delighted to see a wife, a sister, or a daughter publicly pointed out as the mistress of your Royal Highness."

"Such is no doubt the fact," observed George; "for the aristocracy, so haughty and overbearing to the middle and lower classes, is nauseatingly servile and cringing to Royalty. However, we will not waste time in discussing this point. Suffice it for your present purpose that Mr. Clarendon is a man who must be appeased for the dishonour of his daughter.

"Is he acquainted with the little circumstance?" inquired Tim.

"Not yet—at least I hope not. But there is no time to lose, my dear friend——"

"What do you wish to have done?" demanded Meagles.

"A peerage must be obtained for Mr. Clarendon!" was the emphatic response.

"The devil!" ejaculated Tim: "peerages are not picked up in the street; and I don't think that you could very well humble yourself so far to Pitt as to ask him for one."

"No, I would see the Prime Minister dead and damned first," answered the Prince. "It is of my father that the peerage must be demanded; and it is you who will undertake the mission on my behalf."

"Would you have me go to Windsor to wait upon his Majesty on such a business?" demanded Meagles, surveying the Prince with the most unfeigned astonishment.

"To be sure I would!" ejaculated his Royal Highness. "Surely you have the courage, Tim?"

"I have the courage to face the very devil himself," responded Meagles; "and that is more than enough to enable me to look the King in the countenance. But are you serious?"

"Never more so. You know that half of the Lightfoot certificate which I have in my possession?"

"To be sure I do," said Meagles, throwing off with an effort a sensation of uneasiness which suddenly began to creep over him at the mention of that fragment of the document: for the

reader will remember that for some weeks past it had been in the possession of Tim himself, who found it amongst the roll of papers which he purloined from the desk on that morning when the heir-apparent amused himself with the Amazon in the bath.

"Well, Tim," continued the Prince of Wales, "you must take that fragment of the certificate with you, and my illustrious father will be very glad to give you in exchange an undertaking that the necessary patents shall be drawn up without delay, in order to confer the peerage on Mr. Clarendon. Come, Tim, you shall be off to Windsor this very day, for we may as well set briskly and earnestly to work with a view to have these little matters settled as soon as possible. Give me my desk, Tim and I will at once put you in possession of the half of the certificate which is to act like a spell upon my father."

Putting a good face upon the matter, and with as much alacrity as if he knew that the document now required was really in the place where the Prince had deposited it, Tim Meagles proceeded to convey the handsome writing desk from the cheffonier on which it stood to the table by the side of the sumptuous couch. His Royal Highness then drew the long gold chain from beneath his pillow; and with the key suspended thereto he opened the desk.

Plunging his hand amidst the papers which filled one of the compartments, the heir-apparent sought for the particular packet which he required; and when he could not immediately find it, he instituted a more careful and less hurried examination into the contents of that division of his desk. But, the packet still continuing invisible, he rapped out sundry impatient oaths, while a cloud gathered rapidly upon his brow.

"By heaven! I have lost the papers—the very important papers which I am seeking," he observed, in a tone of bitter vexation. "I am sure that I put them away here——"

"You might have locked them up in some other place," suggested Meagles, as if quite innocent of any sinister knowledge concerning them.

"No; I am sure they were *here*!" exclaimed the Prince. "Perdition! some one has been to my desk," he added, his entire countenance contracting with the rage and alarm that gathered rapidly in his breast.

"Have you lost any papers besides the half of the certificate?" demanded Meagles.

"Yes, several," responded the heir-apparent, clenching his fists with impotent fury: "papers of the utmost consequence—proving this very marriage between myself and Mrs. Fitzherbert—"

"That is awkward—very awkward," observed Meagles, shaking his head in a serious manner.

"Awkward!—its positively ruinous," exclaimed the Prince. "What shall I do?—whom can I suspect? The only person at all likely to visit my desk would be Mrs. Fitzherbert herself—"

"Depend upon it, she is the authoress of this circumstance," interrupted Tim; "and if I were you, I would not annoy myself with unpleasant speculations and conjectures. Besides, if any other person should have got hold of those papers, it can only be for the purpose of selling them back again to you—"

"True!" ejaculated the Prince. "But what are we to do now without the fragment of the certificate in Hannah Lightfoot's affair?"

"Have the goodness to listen to me for a few minutes, Prince," said Meagles: "and I dare swear we shall come to a right understanding. You know that I am a man of rather ready wit, and that I don't take a year to decide what ought to be done when the emergency is so pressing as scarcely to leave a minute for reflection. Well, I have hit upon two schemes—"

"Two schemes?" exclaimed the Prince, inquiringly.

"Yes—two schemes," repeated Meagles: "for are there not two separate affairs to settle? One is to induce Mrs. Fitzherbert to consent to separate from you—to renounce all pretensions to be considered your wife—and to agree to such terms for her future maintenance as you may be enabled to propose. This, I say, is one object to gain—and I am the man to accomplish it!"

"You?" cried the Prince with mingled amazement and pleasure. "But Mrs. Fitzherbert does not—"

And he stopped short suddenly.

"Does not like me much better than the devil does holy water, eh?" exclaimed Meagles. "That is what your Royal Highness would have said; and why not finish your sentence? It is useless to stand on ceremony with me. However, I tell you over again that I will undertake to induce the lady,

whether she likes me or not, to assent to all the conditions I have named: but I must stipulate that you do not ask me to explain the means, which I shall adopt for this purpose."

"Damn the means, Tim," exclaimed the Prince, in a hilarious tone, "provided the aim be accomplished: You have my free permission," continued this execrably selfish and diabolically heartless individual, "to use any spells, charms, incantations, or enchantments you choose,—in plain terms, to adopt any means you may think advisable, so long as the grand result be gained."

"Good!" observed Meagles, scarcely able however, to conceal his disgust at the cowardly, unmanly, demoniac treachery which that infamous Prince was capable of practising towards a woman who really loved him. "You may consider the affair relative to Mrs. Fitzherbert as being just the same as if it were settled. On my return from Windsor I will direct my immediate attention thereto."

"Your return from Windsor!" repeated the Prince: "but how can you go thither at all without the document?"

"I have a scheme in my head to meet that emergency also," replied Meagles. "Come, don't ask me any questions, and don't make yourself unhappy: both matters shall be settled, I can promise you. Mrs. Fitzherbert shall agree to your terms on the one hand, and your illustrious father shall grant Mr. Clarendon a peerage on the other hand."

"Is it possible, Tim?" exclaimed the delighted heir-apparent. "You are the cleverest fellow in the universe, by God! But how can I reward you for all this?"

"When I have fulfilled what I have promised, it will be time to talk of recompense," said Meagles. "No cure, no pay: but if there be a cure in this instance, I warn you, my dear Prince, that I shall ask something handsome as my reward, to be granted whenever the means are in your power."

"You cannot ask too much, my dear friend," said his Royal Highness, who was always ready to promise most lavishly at the very moment he was least able to perform.

"Well, well," said Meagles, in a tone of apparent indifference, "we will talk about that another time. I am now off to Windsor."

Thus speaking, he shook hands with the Prince, and took his departure.

CHAPTER LXXX.

THE NEW LIGHT TRACT DISTRIBUTION SOCIETY.

WE must now inform our readers that when the message which his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales sent up to Jermyn Street requesting the immediate attendance of Mr. Meagles at Carlton House, was delivered to that gentleman, he was sitting at a late breakfast in company with his bosom friend the Amazon.

This beautiful, eccentric, and profigate woman was clad in her male garb, as usual; and the early scamper which she had taken on horse-back, left upon her cheeks so ruddy a glow and so rich a bloom of health as to give her the appearance of all the virgin freshness of that youthfulness the plump charms and firm contours of which she had so well preserved.

At the moment when the message from the Prince of Wales was delivered in Jermyn Street, Tim Meagles and his lovely companion were enjoying a hearty laugh in anticipation of some capital fun which they had promised themselves that noon; for the Rev. Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby had presented them with platform tickets for a grand-meeting of the New light Tract Distribution Society, which was to be holden at mid-day precise in a large hall somewhere in the Strand.

But the message from the Prince suddenly appeared to put an end to this project until Meagles suggested that Lady Lade should divert herself by repairing to the meeting where he might join her the moment he had ascertained what His Royal Highness wanted with him.

This arrangement being accordingly settled, Meagles ordered his gig—drove the Amazon to the place of assembly escorted her to a seat upon the platform—and then taking a temporary leave of her, hastened to Carlton House, where he had that interview with the Prince which has been recorded in the preceding chapter.

The body of the hall was crowded to excess. Sanctimonious-looking gentlemen of middle age, pious elderly ladies, and demure old maids, were the principal specimens of animated nature: a great number of bald heads and white neck-cloths were visible;—and, amongst the various odours which saluted the olfactory nerves, that of

brandy decidedly prevailed over the eau-de-cologne, lavender-water, musk, and perspiration.

The platform was very well filled, but not inconveniently crowded; and its occupants were chiefly of the female sex, consisting of the wives, mothers, sisters, grandmothers, aunts, nieces and daughters of the reverend gentlemen connected with the New Light Tract Distribution Society.

When the Amazon made her appearance, in her jaunty attire and with her riding-whip in her hand, those pious ladies elevated their eyes and their hands in an awful manner—while a subdued groan, as if of concentrated bitterness, passed through the assemblage: but smoothing her shining tresses, and stepping over the benches with her admirably symmetrical limbs, Lady Letitia wore a bland and affable expression of countenance as she proceeded to settle herself in a nook where she could hear and see all that was going on, but where she might to some extent escape a degree of observation which it was desirable to avoid even by one of her masculine character and bold disposition.

Scarcely had she thus taken a seat which suited her, when the organ began to play; but as the organist, who was of course a member of the Society, had been up all night at a “free and easy” and was now considerably disguised in liquor, he was not over particular as to the accuracy of the harmony which he thus sent forth to the audience. This little circumstance was not however noticed by the great majority of the assembly: and as for the tipsiness of the individual himself, *that* is a little secret which was not even suspected, but which we have ventured to record for the behoof of our two hundred thousand readers.

The organ had been playing for about five minutes, when a small low door opened at the back of the platform, and thence came forth six or seven demure, sanctimonious, and mournful looking gentlemen, amongst whom were the Rev. Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby and Mr. Ichabod Paxwax.

A tremendous clapping of the hands and stamping of the feet instantly commenced throughout the hall; the organ ceased—and when the applause had finished also, Mr. Ichabod Paxwax vociferated at the top of his voice, “Christian friends, I beg to move that Brother Sneaksby do take the chair!”

The motion, being seconded, was

duly carried and the reverend gentleman took his seat in the presidential chair with as awful a ceremony and as miserable an expression of countenance as if it were the rack or some other frightful engine of torture. For be it remembered that the "saints" always look as wretched and unhappy as possible—just for all the world as if it were a sin to be cheerful, merry, and contented.

Renewed applause accompanied the taking of the chair; and when the clapping of hands and stamping of feet had again subsided, the secretary, who delighted in the euphonious name of Gotobed Tumpkins, gave out a hymn.

Then the whole audience, alike in the body of the hall and on the platform rose up, the organ pealed forth the wrong tune, and a thousand voices combined their nasal twangings in such harmony that would have driven Saint Cecilia crazy had she been alive and present to hear it.

The hymn, which by the bye was of the Secretary's own composing, having been brought to a conclusion—not, however, without some danger of cracking the Amazon's ears, unaccustomed as she was to such peculiar melody,—the Rev. Mr. Sneaksby rose and addressed the meeting at great length.

He said that this was the second anniversary of the New Light Tract Distribution Society, and that he was overpowered with feelings of holy ecstasy on finding that such a numerous, respectable, and godly assemblage had met to celebrate the occasion. The Secretary would presently read his Report, from which interesting document it would appear that several lost sheep had been redeemed from the darkness in which they had long been floundering, and were now amongst the most savoury vessels of the Lord (*Loud cheers.*) But it must not be forgotten that there were still thousands (*groans*);—he might say hundreds of thousands (*deep groans*);—nay, millions (*hollow groans*);—yes, millions of benighted beings whose redemption it was most desirable to work out. (*Hear, hear.*) But how was such redemption to be effected? Mainly by the aid of that Society, whose Tracts could be insinuated into families whither the missionaries of the New Lights could not themselves obtain access. Would that meeting, then, support the Society? (*Cheers.*) Ah! it was all very well to cheer and applaud: but would those

pious, holy, and godly persons whom he (Mr. Sneaksby) was addressing,—would they, he wished to know, put their hands into their pockets? (*Cheers.*) And if they put their hands into their pockets, would they pull them out again with something in them? (*Loud cries of "We will! we will!"*) This was an enthusiasm which he (Mr. Sneaksby) was delighted to behold, and which he fully and completely shared; and he begged to observe that all subscriptions made the day to the funds of the Society would be advertised in the leading newspapers, with the names and addresses of the donors in full. (*Tremendous applause.*) Mr. Sneaksby then delivered a long and eloquent harangue, in which he proved to the satisfaction of all present, the Amazon alone excepted, that heaven was intended exclusively for the New Lights, and that the members of all other sects, creeds, and religious denominations were as assuredly booked for the lower regions as he (Mr. Sneaksby,) was there to proclaim the fact.

The reverend gentleman sate down amidst tremendous cheering, which was prolonged for some minutes,—during which the elderly ladies had recourse to their brandy-flasks whereby they seemed considerably refreshed.

Mr. Gotobed Tumpkins, the Secretary, then rose to read the Report; and, as he had the misfortune to have a crooked leg, he walked with a peculiarly comical up-and-down motion from his seat to the front of the platform. His presence nevertheless elicited immense applause, which he acknowledged with sundry low bows addressed to all quarters of the assembly.

The Report set forth that during the year ending on that day the Society had enjoyed an increased amount of devine grace, the income being 300*l.* more than that of the previous year. (*Cheers.*) During the last twelve months the receipts had amounted to 7,567*l.* 3*s.* 2½*d.*; and the expenditure to 7,567*l.* 3*s.* 2*d.* Balance in the treasurer's hand, one half penny (*Cheers.*) The salaries of Directors, Managers, Secretary, Auditors, Treasurer, and Clerk, amounted to 6,000*l.*: Rent of Offices, Stationery, and Extras; 500*l.*: Law Expenses, 500*l.* There then remained the handsome sum of 567*l.* 3*s.* 2*d.* to expend in the annual tribulation of Tracts; and he (Mr. Gotobed Tumpkins,) could congratulate the members of the Society upon the balance in a hand. It was now fifty-six. balance was not considerably fond of

it was only one halfpenny: still it was a balance—and he would defy their enemies to accuse them of being in debt. (*Loud cheers.*)

When the applause had subsided, a stout consequential-looking little man rose up in the midst of the assembly, and desired to know how law expenses to the amount of 500*l.* had been incurred. Mr. Sneaksby, as chairman, desired him not to interrupt the proceedings; but the little gentleman grew excited, and insisted on having an answer—alleging that he was a subscriber of 5*l.* a-year to the Society and had a right to know how the money was expended.

The Secretary, Mr. Gotobed Tumpkins, thereupon explained that an action had been brought against that holy and pious vessel, the Rev. Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby; for the seduction of a small tradesman's wife; that the Committee of the Society, well convinced of the excellent pastor's innocence, made the cause their own and employed the Society's solicitor to manage the defence; that, when the case was tried, the Judge and Jury were evidently leagued together to oppress the guiltless Mr. Sneaksby; that a verdict was accordingly given against him; and that the Society had to pay the damages and costs in order to save the reverend gentleman from a prison, (*Groans.*) But Mr. Sneaksby was there—in the presence of his friends; and he (Mr. Gotobed Tumpkins) would ask whether he (the Rev. Nathaniel Sneaksby) looked like a guilty man or not.

"Innocent! innocent!" ejaculated innumerable voices; while the object of this sympathy pursed up his mouth in so extraordinary a fashion that he certainly bore at the moment a greater resemblance to a humbug than a saint.

"I protest against adopting the Report with that item of 500*l.* for law expenses," exclaimed the short, fat, consequential-looking man, casting fierce glances around. "I call upon this meeting—"

"Order! order!" cried several voices.

"Chair! chair!" vociferated others.

"I call upon this meeting, I say," roared the little gentleman, becoming very red in the face, "to take notice that a jury of his countrymen has pronounced Nathaniel Sneaksby guilty of principle a married woman—"

a great "!"—"Order!"—"Chair!"—white neck out!" were the cries that amongst the quick succession from all saluted the meeting.

"Yes—turn him out!" bawled Mr. Gotobed Tumpkins from the platform;—and the stout gentleman was accordingly bundled from the hall, and thrust neck-and-crop into the street, with his coat slit up the back, his shirt-frill torn to shreds, and his hat as flat as a pancake.

This little affair being settled, to the indescribable relief of the Reverend Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby, the Secretary was about to resume his Report; when another member in the body of the hall stood up to make a few remarks. Undeterred by the example of the stout, consequential-looking gentleman, this individual began to expatiate in an excited manner upon the monstrous extravagance evidenced in the administration of the Society;—and he was in the midst of a comparison of the sum absorbed in salaries with that which remained to carry out the objects of the association, when the Reverend Mr. Sneaksby rose from his chair, exclaiming, "Dear Christian friends, I put it to you whether this most indecent—this most indelicate—this most unheard of interruption ought to continue?"

"No—no!"—"Order!"—"Chair!"—"Turn him out!" arose from every direction; and, in the twinkling of an eye, that Opposition-member was thrust violently towards the door—kicked ferociously down the steps—and bundled ignominiously out into the street, in as miserable a plight as his predecessor.

This second episode, which afforded uncommon delight to the Amazon, being terminated in so summary a manner, Mr. Gotobed Tumpkins was at length permitted to continue the reading of his Report, which proceeded to set forth several examples and instances of the beneficial results achieved by the Society.

We quote a few of the specimens thus adduced.

"*Case the first.*—Jonathan Crick is a tailor by trade: age forty seven. When a little turned of thirty, married a woman who proved to be much given to drink. Yielding to the effects of evil example, Jonathan Crick became a drunkard likewise. Neither he nor his wife ever went to church or chapel, and never saw a religious Tract. His business went to ruin; and he passed through the Insolvents' Court. Attributes his misfortunes to the want of religious Tracts. On coming out of prison, got a friend to be answerable for the rent

of a small shop and to lend him a few pounds to stock it. But Mrs. Crick made away with everything she could lay her hand on in order to obtain drink. One day—nearly two years ago—one of the New Light's Tracts was left at Crick's shop. This was Tract 127, headed *The Fiery Furnace*. Mrs. Crick was sitting drunk by the fire when the Tract was placed in her hands. She dropped it upon the grate: it caught a-light—she tried to save it—and the flames were communicated to her dress. Before assistance could come, she was burnt to death. The circumstance produced a great effect upon Mr. Crick's mind; and being totally destitute of the wherewith even to buy bread he resolved to abstain from strong drink. In due time a pious widow, belonging to the New Lights visited the unhappy man with a bundle of the Society's Tracts. Crick knew her to be possessed of a competency; and he naturally felt interested in her. They sat down together and read Tract 613, headed *Balaam's Ass*. Greatly refreshed, Mr. Crick besought the pious widow to kneel down and pray with him. This she did; and every day for six months she visited him. On each occasion Mr. Crick prayed devoutly in her presence. The good woman grew attached to the brand which she had plucked from the burning; and at the expiration of the six months she became his wife. Five months after their marriage they were blessed with a full-grown baby, which must be considered a signal mark of divine love for this good couple. Mr. Crick is now an influential, staunch, and regularly paying member of this Society, of the beneficial effects of which he is a striking example: for it was through Tract 127 that he lost a bad wife who drank away all his substance, and through Tract 613 that he obtained a good wife who brought him 200*l.* a year. *Balaam's Ass*, glazed and framed, hangs over his mantel-piece.

"*Case the Second.*—Anthony Sawkins was until recently a tinker: age fifty-three. Had always been particularly fond of smoking. Used to be much addicted to lying in bed and smoking his pipe at the same time. His wife is a bustling, active, economical body, who has brought up a large family respectably, in spite of her husband's indolent habits, of which she vainly endeavoured to break him for many years. When lying in bed, Sawkins

was wont to be perpetually bawling after her to come and bring him a light for his pipe. To save trouble she kept a constant supply of Difkin's Patent self-acting Lights. About eighteen months ago the box containing these matches got damp, and they would not act. This caused Sawkins to be very violent one morning, because he was kept waiting for his favourite pipe. The wretched man abused his wife in the most ungodly style, calling her after the Woman of Babylon. At that moment Tract No. 1, entitled "*The New Light*," was left at the house. *There!*" exclaimed the excellent and pious Mrs. Sawkins, rolling up the paper into a pellet and flinging it at her husband; '*if the old lights won't do, try this New Light!*' The man read the Tract—got up and dressed himself—came to the Society's Office—and inquired whether the Committee wanted a bustling, active man to distribute its publications. Was at once taken into the Society's employment at a salary of twenty-five shillings a-week. Has proved very regular in his attendance, and is a staunch New Light. Says that he never earned more than ten shillings a-week as a tinker; and has every reason to bless the Tract Distribution Society.

"*Case the Third.*—James Clubber is a boy, aged fifteen. Never knew who his parents were: never went to school. Was a beggar in the streets until about a year ago. At that period he was passing by the Office of the Society, just as the printer was delivering in a hundred thousand copies of Tract No. 17, entitled *The Poor Boy's Friend*. By some accident, half a ton of the printed paper fell out of the cart upon James Clubber. He was taken up insensible, and carried into the Office. On being restored to life, he said that he was hungry; whereupon a good meal was given to him, and he speedily recovered altogether. Your Committee, perceiving something intelligent in the boy's countenance, determined to take him into the Society's employment. They did so; and he thankfully accepted the offer. When well dressed, well fed, well paid, well treated altogether, James Clubber acknowledged that he was entirely indebted to Tract 17 for this signal change in his fortunes.

"*Case the Fourth.*—Elizabeth Jenkins was for many years housekeeper to an old gentleman; her age is now fifty-six. She was wont to be giddy, fond of

dress, coquettish, and never went to church: neither did she ever read any religious works whatsoever. Now looks back with horror on her benighted condition and feels that it was entirely owing to the Society that she was ever brought to a state of soul-savouriness. For about fifteen months ago her master got hold to Track 128, headed *The Deceitfulness of Riches*. He made her sit down and read it to him; and such was the effect produced upon his mind that he became convinced that riches were a curse to their possessor. Elizabeth Jenkins was suddenly inspired with the same holy belief: and she prayed and besought the old gentleman to turn all his property into gold—put the greater portion into a bag—and let her go and throw it into the Thames, so that the odious temptations of wealth might be triumphed over at once and for ever. The worthy man, whom our enemies declare to have been in his dotage at the time, complied with this pious suggestion: and Elizabeth Jenkins took away the bag in the middle of the night. Soon afterwards the old gentleman died, and was buried at the expense of the parish. Elizabeth Jenkins is now comfortably off, and thankfully ascribes her present happy position to that admirable Tract on the *Deceitfulness of Riches*.

"*Case the Fifth.*—Susan Bridewell, aged 23, belonged to the class of females termed 'unfortunate'. Was seduced by a Bishop when only fourteen. Lived with a Member of Parliament until she was eighteen; and being a girl of good education, helped him to frame a Bill for the Prevention of Immorality. The death of that gentleman in a fit of intoxication, threw Susan Bridewell upon the town. For four years she led a life of profligacy awful to contemplate; and, as she now declares, often has she cried and wept bitterly, when under the influence of strong waters, to enter into a state of grace. One night, about eleven months ago, she fell down in a hopeless condition of intoxication at the door of a house of ill-fame, in which she lodged. Fortunately for herself—fortunately for this Society—fortunately for the cause of morality, the revered and pious Nathaniel Sneaksby was passing at the moment. He raised her in his arms—he bore her up to her chamber—he laid her upon the bed—and, kneeling down, he prayed all night by her side. When she awoke in the morning, he exhorted

her to turn away from her awful career and think of her salvation: and it will show you in what a benighted state this unhappy creature was, when we record the lamentable circumstance that she accused our respected brother, Mr. Sneaksby of a desire to take his departure without paying her for the alleged sale of her beauty. Vainly did he protest that he had found her drunk and incapable—that he had treated her as a Christian sister—and that he had sorrowed and prayed throughout the night on her behalf. His words were received with ribald laughter—his assurances with obscene jests; and all the Scarlet Women of Babylon dwelling in that house—yea, each one—did congregate and upbraid our brother Sneaksby with terrible revilings. He was therefore compelled to empty his purse for the behoof of those last and unclean vessels; and he departed rather in sorrow than in anger. On his arrival at the Office of the Society, he selected Tract 307, headed *Come unto my arms, O sinner!* and send it to Susan Bridewell. An hour afterwards she arrived in a hackney-coach, and had a long interview with Brother Sneaksby. Alone were they together for several hours; and those hours, Brother Sneaksby assures us, were passed in strenuous endeavours to bring her to a state of grace. He was successful; and the Committee, at once acceding to our reverend pastor's recommendations, took a respectable and comfortable lodging for the poor young woman. Brother Sneaksby continued to visit her frequently, remaining long with her each time, and regaling her with the most refreshing discourse. She told him her history; and he, with that laudable anxiety which ever animates him to forward the interests of the Society, proceeded at once to the Bishop who had originally seduced her, and menaced that wicked prelate with exposure. To avoid such a catastrophe, the Bishop gave a cheque upon his banker for a thousand guineas, whereof one half was duly paid to the young woman and the other half into the treasury of the Society. Susan Bridewell is now living in comfort, happiness, and the practice of all Christian virtues; and she never thinks of the Tract headed *Come unto my Arms*, without feeling a deep sense of gratitude towards the Reverend Nathaniel Sneaksby.

It would be impossible to convey an

idea of the tremendous enthusiasm with which these examples were received. Every one present, the Amazon alone excepted, appeared completely satisfied with such proofs of the beneficial influence and salutary tendency of the New Light Tract Distribution Society; and the last case, especially, enhanced almost into a worship the admiration already experienced towards the Reverend Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby.

Silence having been restored, it was moved, seconded, and carried that the Report be adopted; and the chairman then announced that "their very excellent, staunch, and well-tried friend, Mr. Blarney Gloze, would address the meeting."

"Christian friends," said the gentleman thus introduced, and who was a thin, dapper-looking, consequential personage,—“you will believe me when I declare that this Chewsdays is the most se-uperlatively happy one I ever passed in all my life. It will pre-ueve delightful ne-use for me to send to our Christian friends in the country, —ne-use informing them that this blessed jeu-bilee has placed the Ne-u Lights in so enjeuring a position. For do we not feel like men who, having fought a jewel against infidelity, have come off with no juvious victory—but with a certain triumph? The case of that poorge-irl, Seusan Bridewell, hath deeply touched my beu-zim; and I beg to propose a ve-ote of thanks and gratitude to our dear friend whose ke-ounsel pre-ueved so saleutary in her behalf.”

“Christian friends,” vociferated a stout, vulgar-looking, dogmatical man, suddenly springing up from his seat on the platform,—“I beg leave to second that motion. I conceive it a dooty we owe to our cheerman to testify our gratitood towards him. He has pursood a virtuous career; and every attriboot combines to render him soot-able to the high post he okkipies among us. A wote a thanks is his doo. Our friend Mr. Gloze has rightly said that this is a Toosday sooperlatively happy; and I agree with him that such a joobilee will constitoot glorious noose to send our brothren in the country. Like Mr. Gloze, too, do I look on this Toosday's proceedings as calquilated to place the Noo Lights in an endoorring position: and, in the same way as our friend has so bootifully expressed himself, do I feel like a man who has fout a dooel against infidelity, and come off

with no doobious wictory. As for that poor gurl, Soosan Bidewell, I knoo her when fust Brother Sneaksby brought her to a state of grace; and my boo-zim melts when I think of all she has endoorred. Christian friends, I beg to conclud by seconding the motion of thanks to the cheerman.”

Both these speeches which we have recorded, were received with rapturous applause; and the Rev. Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby rose to deliver an oration in acknowledgment of the honour which had been done him.

But scarcely had the first nasal twang of his elocutionary style begun to vibrate through the air, when the Amazon felt a hand suddenly placed upon her shoulder.

She started—looked up—and beheld Tim Meagles behind her.

“Come, my beauty,” he whispered, bending down his head towards her ear: “you must follow me away from this humbugging scene at once. There is better sport for us in view.”

The beautiful huntress accordingly rose from her seat and accompanied Tim Meagles from the hall.

On reaching the street, he handed her into his gig: then, taking his own seat in the vehicle, he drove at a rapid rate towards Jermyn Street.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE EXPEDITION.

During the drive to his lodgings, Tim Meagles explained in a few hasty words that he was compelled to repair forthwith to Windsor Castle, upon very pressing business in behalf of the Prince of Wales; and he invited the Amazon to accompany him.

“The truth is, my beauty,” he said, with a merry laugh, “I am going to pay my respects to his Majesty King George the Third: and as you and I are now rowing in the same boat with regard to certain little plans and intrigues of our own, I think it will be as well for you to go with me.”

“Are you in earnest, Tim?” demanded the Amazon, with a smile which displayed her brilliant teeth between the moist red lips.

“Never more so in my life, Letitia,” responded Meagles. “The moment we get to Jermyn Street, you will send for your horse—and you can also forward at the same time a note to Sir John,

telling him that you will not be home until to-morrow afternoon or evening. You can do *this*—can't you?"

"Most assuredly," answered the huntress. "But is it your intention that I should merely accompany you to Windsor——"

"Not only to Windsor, my charmer, interrupted Meagles,—“but likewise into the very presence of George the Third himself.”

"Then I must take a change of garments with me," observed Lady Lade: "and in order to select an appropriate attire, it is absolutely necessary that I should go home first——"

"No such thing!" exclaimed Meagles. "We will have some fun with the old King, depend upon it—and therefore you shall appear before him in your Amazonian garb. The instant he knows what our business is, he will be civil enough, I can promise you. But here we are."

And as Meagles thus spoke, the gig stopped at Mrs. Pigglesberry's house in Jermyn Street.

The instant that Tim and his fair companion got up-stairs, the requisite orders were issued for their journey; and a hasty note, which the Amazon penned to her husband, was despatched by Wasp to the baronet's house in King Street,—the page likewise receiving instructions to bring round her ladyship's favourite steed.

It was about half-past two o'clock when the preparations for departure were accomplished: and now behold Tim Meagles mounted on a spirited horse, which however knew its master's hand by the way in which he held the reins,—the Amazon bestriding a beautiful animal, whose curvettings at starting enabled her to display her unequalled skill in the equestrian art,—and Master Wasp seated on the prettiest pony that ever attracted notice with its exquisite shape and its graceful action.

Such was the cavalcade which now moved away from Jermyn street, and proceeded gently over the stones until the good hard road was gained; and then the steeds broke into a smart trot.

Nothing could exceed the picturesque elegance of Lady Letitia's appearance as she sate, like a modern Diana the Huntress, upon that beautiful animal which she managed with such skill and which seemed proud to bear so lovely and interesting a burthen.

The fine sharp, frosty air brought the

richest carnation hues to the Amazon's cheeks: her eyes—those superb dark eyes—shone with the excitement of a kindred glow; her luxuriant hair, glossy and silken, streamed in a myriad ringlets from beneath the broad-brimmed hat which she wore so jauntily and which gave a certain archness of expression to her handsome features.

And how faultless was her carriage—how full of winning grace and statuesque elegance was her attitude on horseback! The harmony of all the undulating lines which traced the fine contours, the rounded limbs, and the voluptuous reliefs of her symmetrical form,—the suppleness of which her organs were capable, the lightness of her movements, and the flexibility which distinguished her muscular powers,—and the superb swell of the bosom that seemed ready to burst through the tightly-fitting coat which served as an external indication of the luxuriance and firmness of that bust,—all these were set off to their utmost advantage by the feminine gracefulness mingled with the masculine skill and boldness which characterised her appearance as an equestrian.

Ten thousand times more attractive was she in her male attire than when dressed in the garb which properly belonged to her sex. For whereas the latter concealed all that fine sweeping length of limb which the Amazon passed in such perfection,—so, on the other hand, did the tight breeches and the elegant boots develope and set off, rather than conceal, those robust but symmetrical proportions which we have just eulogised. In the same way did the close-fitting frock exhibit the great expansion of the hips—the waist that seemed so wasp-like in its slenderness when compared with the fulness of the contiguous parts—and that exuberant bust which a very critical judgment would have pronounced too large to satisfy a pure and delicate taste for beauty.

But a splendid creature was she, certainly—and well might Tim Meagles be proud of the companionship of that goddess-like horsewoman.

Her fine large dark eyes sparkled with vivacity and spirit: the smiles that wreathed her rich led lips were full of cheerfulness;—and the glowing colour which was heightened by exertion, resembled, the brightened bloom of the carnation, dying off into ivory fairness.

To gaze upon her for a few moments,

was sufficient to convince the beholder that to a gay and joyous nature she united a warm and voluptuous temperament,—and that boldly and fearlessly as she could dash along over gate and fence, and barrier and ditch, in the ardour of the chase, so meltingly and tenderly could she dissolve into amorous softness and yield herself up to the delicious abandonment of wanton dalliance.

Having trotted—then cantered—and then galloped along the road for some distance, the party reined in their steeds to a walk; and Meagles now related in full all the particulars of his interview with the Prince of Wales.

"Well," exclaimed the Amazon, laughing heartily, "this is about as amusing an adventure as I was ever led into, or as you and I were ever bent upon together. Here we are,—you in your riding-dress, and I in my huntress-garb,—on our way to Windsor Castle to demand an audience of the King;—and the object of that audience is the modest request of a peerage for some gentleman whose name is probably unknown to his Majesty's ears."

"I admit that the adventure is singular and the object is somewhat bold," said Meagles, echoing his fair companion's merry laugh: "but depend upon it, my beauty, that we will succeed. I have got the document—the precious document—in my pocket," he added, his tone suddenly becoming more serious: "and if his Majesty be proof against *that*—why then I shall be most wonderfully mistaken."

But for what reason on earth have you resolved to drag me into the royal presence?" inquired Lady Letitia.

"In the first place, my charmer," answered Tim, "because you and I are partners in certain schemes and plans—"

"But do you fancy, my dear fellow," interrupted the huntress, reproachfully, "that I cannot trust you to manage things by yourself? I would not wrong you to such extent, Tim," she added, hastily: "for you know that I entertain an affection for you—and I believe that I am not altogether indifferent to you."

"You may well say that, Letitia!" ejaculated Meagles, although at the same instant the image of Rose Foster sprang up in his mind and caused him to heave a sigh. "But, as I was observing," he hurriedly continued, "I thought it right, in the first place, that

you should come with me; and secondly, I wanted a cheerful companion. If you object to my first motive, you will at least give me credit for the latter.

"Ah! you are a good-for-nothing fellow, Tim," exclaimed the huntress, slashing him across the shoulders in a playful manner with her riding-whip. "And so I suppose we shall pass the night at Windsor—eh?" she observed, glancing archly towards him.

"As a matter of course—because we cannot hope to see his Majesty before to-morrow morning, although we will endeavour to obtain an interview this evening," said Meagles. "But remember, my beauty, you will pass as Mrs. Meagles at the hotel at Windsor—and now you comprehend what *that* means."

"We shall see all about it presently, Tim," responded Lady Letitia, laughing. "I suppose that Wasp will tell no tales on our return to London."

"If Wasp were inclined to gossiping, he might have told enough concerning us long ago," said Meagles. "But neither he nor the excellent Mrs. Piggleberry ever seem to take the slightest notice when you pass the night with me at my lodgings."

"Hold your tongue, Tim!" exclaimed the Amazon. "It is positively shocking to talk in such a way in the broad daylight," she added, her merry laugh again ringing musically through the crisp sharp air. "And now tell me, Mrs. Scape-grace why you have undertaken that crusade against poor Mrs. Fitzherbert, whom the unprincipled George is thus resolved to persecute?"

"Mrs. Fitzherbert has always hated me as sincerely as the devil does holy water," answered Meagles; "and at times she has been most repulsively rude and insufferably insolent towards me. Now you know, my charmer, that I have never merited such treatment at her hands: for I have frequently rendered her little services which she ought not to forget. More than once have I taken her jewellery to the pawnbroker's for her when she was short of cash and the Prince had none to give her; and I have even given my own security and lent my own money to silence her most clamorous creditors. But I do not recollect that I have ever received from her lips a single word of thanks. She has treated me as if I were a lacquey—a lickspittle—a slave—a servile wretch who was only fitted to be employed in the vilest offices;

and who was too well rewarded by the mere fact of being allowed to perform such services for Royalty. Now, my dear Letitia, could I do otherwise than smart under such behaviour as this?"

"I admit that the provocation is great, Tim," said the Amazon: "but you are too good-hearted a fellow to cherish vindictive feelings—especially against a poor weak woman, who will shortly find her own husband—for such indeed the Prince is—becoming her greatest enemy."

"Were it a mere question of vengeance, my daring huntress," responded Meagles, "I should scorn—despise the idea. Vengeance against a woman is beneath a man. But the conduct which I propose to pursue in respect of Mrs. Fitzherbert, essentially regards the particular schemes that you and I have formed. Therefore, as it suits my interests—or rather *our* interest—to league with the Prince against that lady, you can well comprehend that her conduct has not been such as to excite any compunction or remorse in my breast so as to induce me to hesitate ere I undertake this crusade against her."

"But I do not yet comprehend how it will serve our views to adopt such a course," said the Amazon.

"In a very few words I can explain myself," answered Meagles. "We wish to obtain as complete a hold upon the Prince as possible—do we not? Well—let him break with Mrs. Fitzherbert—let him marry the Princess of Brunswick—and he is ten thousand times more effectually in our power than at the present moment. For we possess the *proofs* of his union with Mrs. Fitzherbert—a Catholic——"

"I understand, Tim," interrupted Lady Lade: "an exposure of this marriage would prove ruinous to George, whether as Prince of Wales or King of England—and, as you justly observed, he becomes more completely enmeshed in our snares than ever."

"Then you approve of the course which I have undertaken to adopt?" said Meagles, inquiringly.

"Yes—now that I consider it in all its bearings," replied the Amazon. "Well," she added, with another merry laugh, "I do really believe that you will die a Duke in the end, Tim. But remember," she exclaimed, her mirth subsiding into an arch smile,— "remember that I am also to be a Duchess."

"I have not forgotten our bargain, my love," exclaimed Meagles.

Thus speaking, he put spurs to his steed; and the party broke into a sharp trot.

It was about a quarter to five when they entered the town of Windsor; and, proceeding direct to the White Hart hotel, they put up their horses at the stables belonging to that establishment. Meagles then made inquiries of the landlord as to the probability of obtaining an audience of his Majesty that evening: but by the answers he received, he was speedily convinced that he must postpone all hope of seeing the King until the following morning. He accordingly signified his intention of passing the night at the hotel, and the landlord forthwith led the way to a handsome suite of apartments.

Being thus installed at the White Hart, in company with the Amazon, Meagles ordered an excellent dinner; while Wasp, who had received a hint to speak of the huntress as his master's wife was suitably provided for in the kitchen.

By means of an excellent bottle of claret and a pleasant conversation, Tim Meagles and Lady Lade whiled away the time until eleven o'clock, when they retired to rest in each other's arms.

At half past nine on the following morning they were seated at breakfast; and when the meal was concluded, they sallied forth from the White Hart and proceeded in the direction of the Castle.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

THE INTERVIEW.

WE must now request our readers to accompany us into a small but elegantly furnished apartment in Windsor Castle.

A cheerful fire blazed in the grate; and standing on the rug, with one arm leaning on the mantel, King George the Third was dictating a letter to a young lady of great beauty who was seated at a superb writing-table.

His Majesty was at this time fifty-seven years old. Naturally of a robust and vigorous constitution, he seemed well adapted to maintain a successful struggle against the influence of advancing age: but Care had accom-

plished what Time could not do—and had bowed the form and traced wrinkles upon the countenance of that monarch.

For, Oh! deep was the sorrow which his heart cherished, and bitter was the remorse which wrung his soul with anguish: and there were moments and hours, and days in that King's life when *he* envied the lot of the poorest of his subjects, and when *they* would not have envied him had all been known.

It has hitherto been the custom and the fashion to speak of George the Third in terms of praise: historians for the most part denominate him a good King—and monarchy-worshipping panegyrists have endowed him with every possible virtue. He has been called the Father of his People—the Paternal Sovereign—and a Pattern of Virtue and Morality: the world has been gravely told that England never was so happy, prosperous, and free as under his rule;—and it seems so natural to speak of “the good old times” of George the Third, that thousands of our readers will doubtless be astonished and startled when we assure them that a more infamous miscreant never disgraced a throne than that man!

A superstitious bigot in religious matters—entertaining the most implicit belief in the divine right of Kings—looking upon the people as having been made for him, and not himself for the people—of such a disbolically cruel disposition that he never would exercise the prerogative of mercy, but gloated over the idea of miserable wretches being strung up in dozens and half-dozens at a time—so heartlessly tyrannical that he waged a sanguinary war against the brave Americans when they so gloriously threw of his infernal yoke—so wedded to despotic notions that he expended hundreds of millions of treasure and poured forth British blood in torrents in order to combat the French Revolution and its effects—and of such a base, mean, cowardly, and despicable character that he not only persecuted men with unrelenting bitterness for their political and religious opinions, but also employed spies, agents, and informers to get up public meetings and disturbances, in order that the people might be mown down by artillery and cut to pieces by charging cavalry,—such was George the Third!

But who was the beautiful young woman that was writing at the table

on the occasion of which we are now especially speaking?

She was the King's favourite daughter, the Princess Amelia.

In personal appearance and in disposition there was a great similitude between this Princess and her sister Sophia, whom we have already introduced to our readers.

The beauty of Amelia was however, of a more voluptuous cast than that of Sophia.

Her complexion was dazzlingly fair—enriched upon the cheeks with the sweetest and most delicate vermeil bloom. When her mind was perfectly tranquil and her pulses were not quickened by the excitement of thoughts, or passions, or emotions,—then did the soft lustre of her large blue eyes shed the calmest expression over her entire countenance, giving an air of pensive repose to her features. When gently moved by pleasurable feelings, the glances of those azure orbs and the soft smile that played around her mouth, denoted the union of a warm heart with a kind and generous nature: but when more profoundly excited, the looks and the manners of the Princess evinced all the vivid and varying sensibilities of an impassioned woman. Then, too, her eyes would swim in a voluptuous languor: the flesh of sensuality would appear upon her countenance—and the heightening scarlet of the full, pouting, and almost coarse lips would indicate strong desires and a licentious imagination.

Her figure was more full and of richer contours than even that of her sister Sophia. Her sloping shoulders were softly rounded, giving her the faintest, slightest semblance of stooping: and yet they borrowed the appearance of breadth from the well-expanded chest, whence the bosoms rose grandly. But in their luxuriance, these large glowing orbs were scarcely divided in the middle—while laterally they protruded on the space occupied by the arms. The whole form of the Princess Amelia was characterised by *embonpoint*, and was soft, full, and voluptuous in the extreme,—leaving the waist, however, sufficiently symmetrical, though by no means sylph-like. Indeed, her Royal Highness was a perfect Hebe in the style of her beauty and the luscious ripeness of her charms;—and alike in person and in temperament did she appear to have been formed by nature for the enjoyment of wanton pleasures.

Over those shoulders so dazzlingly

white,—not snowy nor like alabaster, but of the inimitable whiteness of living flesh which is fair and soft to the eye,—over those shoulders, we say, flowed a profusion of silky hair, not so colourless as flaxen nor so deep as auburn—but of the bright and glossy golden hue which exists between.

Such was the Princess Amelia;—and although her form, expanded into the luxuriance of womanhood, gave her the appearance of at least three or four and twenty years of age,—yet in reality was she only eighteen.

It was about a quarter past ten o'clock in the morning when we thus introduce our readers to the King and his favourite daughter:

The former was dictating, and the latter was writing, a letter to the Princess Caroline of Brunswick who had already been fixed upon as the future spouse of the Prince of Wales: for whenever a member of the English Royal Family requires a husband or a wife, as the case may be, recourse is invariably had to the tribe of beggarly German pauper princes and princesses;—and thence has it arisen that England is either infested with these greedy and disgusting foreign leeches whose ravenous maws are never satiated with drinking the heart's blood of the toiling, starving oppressed, and trampled-on industrious classes,—or else our treasury is compelled to grant revenues to those petty potentates who would not even be blessed with a thatch to their houses if it were not for British gold.

But John Bull is the greatest fool in all Christendom; for not contented with ministering to the rapacity of those titled robbers denominated the aristocracy, he must need permit the paltriest German rascals and demireps that ever bore jaw-breaking names to plunder him in the most flagrant manner, just because they are Grand Dukes or Dukes, and Grand-Duchesses or Duchesses!

Let us however continue our narrative before we lash ourselves into a fury at these iniquities.

The Princess Amelia had just closed, sealed, and addressed her letter, when a page entered to inform his Majesty that a lady and gentleman humbly besought an audience on behalf of certain matters connected with his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales.

At the mention of his eldest son's name, a cloud spread rapidly over the countenance of the King: but checking the ejaculation of displeasure which

had risen to the very tip of his tongue, he demanded whether the lady and gentleman who sought an interview had given their names.

The page handed his Majesty a card, whereon appeared the name of MR. MEAGLES.

"I've heard of him—I've heard of him!" ejaculated the monarch, flinging the card petulantly upon the writing-table, and speaking with more than his usual volubility. "Pitt, who knows everything—everything—says he's a sad dog—sad dog. And he's very intimate with George, too—very intimate: a drinking companion, I'll be bound—I'll be bound. I will not see him at all," added the King, turning abruptly towards the page and speaking as savagely as if it were the page himself who was giving offence or annoyance.

The youth bowed and was retreating towards the door, when the Princess Amelia, who had taken up the card and looked at it made a rapid sign for him to remain: then, raising from her seat, and approaching her father, she said, "You know, sire, that this gentleman—Mr. Meagles, I believe," she added, glancing at the card to assure herself that she had pronounced the name correctly,—“is a very intimate friend of my brother; and it can be no ordinary matter which has led Mr. Meagles to solicit a private audience of your Majesty.”

"Do you think so, 'Melia?—do you think so?" exclaimed the King, who had a nervous habit of reiterating the half broken and jerking kind of sentences of which his conversation was composed.

"I do indeed think, my dear father, that you ought to see this Mr. Meagles," said the Princess, in a firm tone but with a sweetly coaxing and irresistibly winning manner.

"Well, well—I will see him—Meagles, eh?—Meagles—Meagles," exclaimed his Majesty, as if practising his tongue to pronounce the name correctly. "Queer appellation, that—very queer! Meagles—Meagles—Meagles," continued the monarch, in a musing style.

"The page is awaiting your Majesty's commands," said the Princess.

"Oh! commands—eh? Meagles—eh?" cried the King, still harping with a species of childishness or imbecility upon the name. "Meagles—Meagles! Well—let Mr. Meagles be introduced into our presence—and Mrs. Meagles,

too; for I suppose it must be Mrs. Meagles who is with him. Meagles—Meagles!”

And his Majesty kept on repeating the name for at least a dozen times, but in a sinking tone—so that at last the iteration ended in an inaudible whisper,

The page, understanding that he was to bring the visitors into the royal presence, bowed and withdrew; and the princess Amelia likewise retired.

King George the Third then began to pace the room in a nervous manner and with uneven steps—renewing his muttered iterations of the name of Meagles.

At length the door was thrown open—and the page announced, “Mr. and Mrs. Meagles” in a loud voice.

Another moment—and Tim and the Amazon stood in the presence of the King!

Now George the Third was a great stickler for Court etiquette; and when his eyes encountered the gentleman in a riding-dress and the lady in her male attire, each too with whip in hand, a frown of displeasure gathered rapidly upon that countenance which was usually so stolid, vacant, and inane in its expression.

Meagles instantaneously saw that the king was displeased—and the huntress also observed that sinister cloud spreading upon the royal features and the truth struck them both at the same instant. But for this little incident they were not altogether unprepared; and Meagles hastened to offer those excuses which he deemed suitable.

“Your Majesty is surprised—and doubtless offended,” he said, in a very respectful tone, “that Mrs. Meagles should have ventured to appear in such an attire before your Majesty—or that I should have been bold enough to come hither otherwise than in the costume befitting a Court. But we are plain, honest, every-day kind of people: and we hope your Majesty will give us credit for acting on the impulses of a moment when the object is to serve a friend. In plain terms, the business which has brought us to Windsor Castle is of so pressing a nature that we really had not time to make any change in our costume.”

“And your name is Meagles—Meagles—eh?” gasped the King, eyeing him with great suspicion.

“Such is my name, at your Majesty’s service,” was the reply. “Your

Majesty’s son, the Prince of Wales, usually calls me ‘Tim’—and sometimes ‘My dear Tim.’ As for my creditors—they call me ‘honest Mr. Meagles.’”

“Well—well,” exclaimed his Majesty, not knowing exactly what to make of the gentleman, and uncertain whether to give him credit for matchless impudence or genuine John Bull bluntness: “we shall know more of you presently, I dare say—I dare say. And this is Mrs. Meagles—eh?”

“This is Mrs. Meagles, may it please your Majesty” answered Tim.

“Fine woman—monstrous fine woman,” muttered the King to himself as he surveyed the Amazon from head to foot: and, while his eyes were thus wandering leisurely and scrutinizingly over her splendid form, as she stood in a graceful attitude of dignified self-possession before him, a glimmering of satisfaction appeared upon his countenance. “Ah! fine woman, Mrs. Meagles, he repeated in a louder tone: “very fine woman—Mrs. Meagles—monstrous fine woman! Dress not so unbecoming after all—not near so unbecoming: rather suitable, on the contrary—rather suitable.”

And then, turning slowly away, he seated himself in an arm-chair near the writing-table.

“You’ve quite charmed his wicked old eye, my beauty,” said Meagles in a low tone to the Amazon.

“Eh! what—what?” ejaculated the King, starting up again. “What’s that you said, Mr. Meagles—what’s that? Something about an eye?”

“I ventured to observe, sire,” was the cool but respectful response, “that I flattered myself that my wife had found favour in your Majesty’s royal eye.”

“Oh! ah! Well—there’s no harm in saying *that*—no harm at all, Mr. Meagles,” exclaimed King George the Third, quietly resuming his seat. “Come, now—what is the motive of your presence here?—why have you besought an audience of your Sovereign? From the observations you have already made, Meagles, I do not suppose that the Prince has wronged this lady—your wife, I mean—Mrs. Meagles.”

“Very far from it, may it please your Majesty,” answered Tim. “The truth is, my wife is so deeply imbued with a sense of his Royal Highness’s invariable kindness, condescension, and goodness towards me, that she

insisted upon accompanying me to Windsor Castle in the hope that her prayers and entreaties, when united with my own, would have additional weight in the consideration of your Majesty."

"Prayers;—entreaties! How now?" ejaculated the King. "What is the matter? Speak out, Meagles—or do you speak for your husband, madam."

"May it please your Majesty," said the Amazon, advancing a little closer towards the King, and then standing with a most graceful and elegant attitude in his presence,—it is on behalf of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales that my husband and myself have ventured to appear before our Sovereign—fully convinced that our good gracious King will at all events accord us a patient hearing, the more so inasmuch as it is no favour that we seek on our own account."

"Prettily expressed—musical voice—good teeth," muttered the King to himself: then in a louder tone, he said "Go on, Mrs. Meagles—I am listening with attention, Mrs. Meagles. Go on."

"Profoundly does it afflict me, may it please your Majesty," she resumed, "that—"

"No—no: it doesn't please me that you should be afflicted, Mrs. Meagles," exclaimed George III, interrupting her in almost a playful manner. "But go on—go on—Mrs. Meagles: I'm all attention again—all attention."

"I was about to inform your Majesty," continued the Amazon, "that his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales has had the misfortune to seduce a young lady of good family—"

"Had the misfortune!" ejaculated the King, springing to his feet. "The misfortune do you call it, Mrs. Meagles?—misfortune, indeed—misfortune! And pray is there no misfortune on the other side? Has the young lady nothing to complain of Mrs. Meagles? Come—answer me. Misfortune, indeed!"

And his Majesty sank back again into the arm-chair.

"I meant to observe, may it please you, sire," continued the huntress, after darting a sly glance at Tim Meagles, who enjoyed the whole scene uncommonly,— "I meant to observe that it was a great misfortune for both parties:—for the young lady, because she belongs to a family connected with the peerage—and for his Royal Highness, because he must take some immediate step to hush the matter up."

"And for this purpose he has sent you both to me," exclaimed the King, once more leaping from his seat, and now flying into a passion. "Upon my word—a pretty misfortune, truly—seductions right and left come to my knowledge—and the hero—always George, Prince of Wales! Pretty misfortune, indeed! Young lady connected with the peerage!" Who is she, madam?" he demanded, turning abruptly round upon the Amazon as if he were about to snap her head off.

"Her name is Octavia Clarendon, may it please your Majesty," was the response. "Her father is distantly related to the Lord Marchmont."

"Ah! the Lord Marchmont—good Tory—staunch supporter—pillar of the throne!" ejaculated the King. Then, growing considerably calmer, he shook his head saying, "This affair must indeed be looked into. Won't do to offend a man like Lord Marchmont—always votes in favour of Ministerial measures. Lord Marchmont—good Tory—would vote black's white, or white's black, to please me. Ah! he is a true aristocrat—a staunch noble—Lord Marchmont! Well, Mrs. Meagles, I suppose that as yet this misfortune has been hushed up?"

"Such is the case, may it please your Majesty," answered Lady Lade.

"And what do you suggest?—what do you require me to do?" demanded the King resuming his seat.

"To confer the honour of a peerage, with an accompanying pension, upon Mr. Clarendon, the father of this young lady whom the Prince has seduced," was the response.

"Never!" ejaculated George III, his puffy cheeks becoming purple with rage: and, bounding from his chair, he stood for a few moments gazing ferociously upon the Amazon, but unable to utter another word. "No—never!" he at length exclaimed. "I am not to be persuaded into such a course as this. What! dishonour the peerage by selling it, as it were, for a girl's beauty! Upon my word, Mrs. Meagles—no Meagles—I beg your pardon—Mrs. Meagles—I am surprised that you and your husband should have had the audacity to seek my presence for such a purpose. Our interview is at an end—the audience is closed."

And the King, turning abruptly away, was advancing towards the door of an inner room, when Tim Meagles exclaimed. "One word, may it please your Majesty!"

"One word!" repeated the King, stopping short. "What for, sir?—what more can you or your wife have to say to me? One word, indeed—one word!"

"Yes—one word," exclaimed Meagles, emphatically: "for your Majesty does not appear to be fully aware of the seriousness—the extreme seriousness——"

"The seriousness of what, sir?" demanded the King, now turning completely round, and retracing his steps towards his importunate visitors: "the seriousness of what, sir—of what?" he reiterated, nervously, and greatly agitated.

"Of his Royal Highness's position," answered Meagles, in a firm and resolute manner,

"It is not I who have placed him in it," exclaimed his Majesty: "he has done it all himself—all himself. You may retire, Mr. Meagles—Meagles—you may retire. Any further colloquy on the subject will be useless—quite useless."

"Nay—then I am afraid your Majesty will drive his Royal Highness to extremes," said Tim; "and the unpleasant consequence of this affair will not be experienced by him alone."

"What do you mean, sir?" inquired the King, struck by the mingled singularity of an observation the covert menace of which was unmistakable; "what do you mean? Speak—sir! what do you mean?" he repeated petulantly.

"I mean, sire," responded Tim Meagles, looking the monarch full in the face, "that his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales will not fall alone. If he sink beneath the weight of infamy and shame, he will drag down others with him—yes—even though it be his own father. And that is God's truth?"

George III sank upon a chair, gasping.

Was it possible that he had heard aright—or had his ears deceived him? He closed his eyes for a few moments, the more easily to commune with himself by shutting out all exterior objects from his view: and this brief but painful interval of reflection convinced him that it was no delusion—that his ears had *not* misled him—and that a threat, darkly intelligible, had been uttered by the daring man who still stood in his presence.

Then all the vindictive blood of the Guelphs rushed to his countenance—tinging even the whites of his eyes,

and making the orbs themselves seem ready to start out of his head: and, springing from his chair, he threw a furious look upon Meagles, exclaiming, "I understand you, sir—I understand you! My son has made you the instrument and agent of his own vile undutifulness; and you are base enough to lend yourself to his parricide intentions. But you may return to him, sir—you may return to him and tell him—that I defy his menaces. Yes—I—his father—I—the King—scorn and laugh at this silly, wretched attempt—to—tc——"

"Your Majesty should know that hard words do not break bones," interrupted Tim Meagles, in a tone and manner so full of easy defiance that the king was perfectly staggered. "Your Majesty has thought fit to couple my name in an injurious fashion with that of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales; but I am tough enough to bear all your Majesty has just said, and a great deal more."

"This to me sir!" ejaculated George III, now literally foaming with rage. "Begone!"—and he extended his hand towards the bell.

"One word;—only one word more!" cried Meagles. "Does your Majesty really wish that a certain certificate should be published to the world?"

"I care not!" exclaimed the King, still holding the bell-pull. "As my scape-grace son's boon companion, you are of course in the secret respecting that fragment of a document——"

"Fragment!" repeated Meagles; fragment did your Majesty say? I beg your pardon, sire—but the whole paper is in our possession—in *my* possession.

"It's false, sir—it's false!" ejaculated George III. "My son has often told me that before—but he never could produce more than one half——"

"Your Majesty may now, therefore, have an opportunity of seeing the whole," said Meagles, in a tone of calm confidence almost bordering upon cool insolence, as he displayed the perfect certificate.

"And a very pretty production it would be to print and issue to the world," observed the Amazon, again coming to her paramour's assistance.

"Ah! you would not dare——no—you could not," gasped the wretched King, as the proof—the damning proof of his atrocious perjury to Hannah Lighfoot was thus placed before his eyes: for a single glance at the docu-

ment was sufficient to convince him that the missing half was really found, and that no forgery had been accomplished to supply its place.

Sinking back into the seat which he had resumed and piqued with such nervous frequency during this memorable interview the King covered his face with his hands and groaned aloud in the bitterness of his spirit. He forgot that there were persons present to see and hear him: and even if he had remembered the fact, he could not have suppressed that evidence of emotions profoundly excited.

For, oh! in the heart of this tyrant King a certain chord had been made to vibrate with ineffable anguish; and with whirlwind speed had memory traversed the gulf of many, many years,—going back to those days—the days of his youth—when he had loved for the first time—nay, for the only time in all his life—and when he tasted of that drop of balm which turns the gall of this world's cup into a delicious nectar. For such is woman's affection: and it was the love of a tender and confiding soul which was given to him! Then, although he had learnt to appreciate how delicate is the fabric of the female heart, yet had he rudely broken the hollowed tie which bound such a heart to him; and he knew that the being who had adored him too tenderly and cherished his image all too fondly, had gone down into a premature grave—the victim of his perjury—a sacrifice to his broken vows! Long years—oh! long and many years had been reckoned and numbered since *then*: he had married *another*—and a numerous family had sprung up around him. But though perfidy may have its hour and seduction its triumph, yet remorse never fails sooner or later to exact its debt. And thus were there seasons when the soul of this bad King was rent with the anguish of a conscience suffering all the torture and crucifixion of memory's scorpion-stings: for though time had passed over his heart, it was only to reveal it, in his old age, like the disentombed city, with all the hopes and passions of an earlier period preserved in the very lava which had choked them!

For nearly five minutes did King George III remain thus absorbed in the most excruciating reflections: and Tim Meagles and the Amazon dared not even exchange glances with each other—for they felt a secret awe at having

thus plunged a crowned monarch into so deep an abyss of humiliation and mental pain.

At length the King raised his head hastily;—and, beckoning Meagles to approach, he said in a low and sadly altered tone, "Am I to understand that the document which you have shown me will be given up when the demand of my son is complied with?"

"Your Majesty cannot expect that I should part with so interesting a relic," observed Meagles: then, fixing his eyes significantly upon the monarch's countenance, he added, "Such a piece of paper, sire, is worth a dukedom."

"Heaven protect my son—heaven guard him from these extortioners—when he succeeds me!" murmured the King, with a slight access of returning irritability: but, immediately suppressing his rising anger and steadying his trembling nerves with all the effort of which he was capable, he said in a louder tone, "Mr. Meagles, you will not publish that document?—you cannot wish to do so? No—no—I am sure you cannot. And now listen to me attentively—very attentively."

His Majesty paused for a few moments, while both Meagles and the Amazon drew nearer towards him.

You are sensible people—both of you—very sensible people, I am confident," resumed the King; "and you must therefore see that I cannot grant a peerage in this abrupt, sudden, and extraordinary manner. But I will tell you what I can do, Mr. Meagles—and Mrs. Meagles. I will speak to Pitt about Lord Marchmont—I will tell him that I wish to confer a mark of my esteem on that nobleman—and then he will institute inquiries respecting his lordship's family and relatives. You understand me—eh? Well, the name of Mr. Clarendon will thus transpire—and all I want is to be able to bring it on the *tapis*. The rest is easily managed—easily managed," added the King, speaking in a musing tone to himself rather than addressing his words to those whose ears they however reached. "Yes—yes—there will be no difficulty—no difficulty. Mr. Meagles—Mr. Meagles," exclaimed his Majesty with startling suddenness after a few moment's pause, "you may return to my son and inform him that for the last time I consent to help him out of his embarrassment. Within a week or ten days a peerage shall be offered to this, Mr. Clarendon of whom you

have spoken. In the interval the most rigid secrecy must be maintained respecting the negotiation. I presume that your Mr. Clarendon is as yet ignorant of his daughter's shame?"

Meagles replied in the affirmative.

"So much the better," continued the King, speaking in a more collected manner than he had yet done. "Now, understand me well, Mr. Meagles—and you also Mrs. Meagles,—understand me. I repeat, when I say that not a hint of all this must be breathed to Mr. Clarendon until my Minister shall have officially communicated my royal will and pleasure with regard to him. On the same day that this communication is made, the Prince of Wales shall receive a hint to that effect. Then—and not till *then*, Mr. Meagles may it be intimated to Mr. Clarendon that this boon of a peerage, with an accompanying pension, is the price of his silence and forbearance—You know what I mean" added the monarch impatiently, as he sprang with characteristic abruptness from his seat.

"I understand your Majesty fully," said Meagles; "and I thank your Majesty for the gracious promise of which I shall now be the joyful messenger to his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales."

The King scarcely waited to hear the conclusion of this sentence, but retired to the inner room.

Tim Meagles and the Amazon then quitted Windsor Castle, well pleased with the result of their interview.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

THE PRINCESS AMELIA

THE favourite daughter of George III, upon leaving the King in order that he might grant an audience to Mr. Meagles and his fair companion, retired into an adjacent room, where she endeavoured to amuse herself with a book. But feeling convinced that something unpleasant had occurred in respect to her brother the Prince of Wales, and dreading that such intelligence might produce a disagreeable effect upon her father, her uneasiness became most painful; and when she heard the King talking in a loud and angry tone in the next room, she was quite unable to endure the torture of suspense any longer.

Approaching the door communicat-

ing with that apartment, she became a listener just at that point in the discourse when her father, interrupting the Amazon's narrative, dwelt with such emphatic reiteration on the word "misfortune." But it was not until several more sentences had been exchanged between his Majesty and the Amazon, that the Princess Amelia learnt the entire truth: namely, that her eldest brother had seduced a young lady of respectable family—that the name of the victim was Octavia Clarendon—that she was related to Lord Marchmont—and that a peerage and pension for the father were suggested as the means of hushing up the girl's disgrace and the heir-apparent's treachery.

The Princess Amelia was shocked, certainly—but not particularly amazed. The irregularities, gaieties, and gallantries of her eldest brother were too numerous, too notorious, and too flagrant to be entirely a secret to her; and indeed, the King was often wont to deplore when alone with his favourite daughter, the course of life which the Prince of Wales was leading.

She was not surprised, then, we say, when from the discourse now passing between his Majesty and the Amazon she gathered the particulars of her brother's new freak and the embarrassment in which it had plunged him: nor was she astonished when her sire so peremptorily and irascibly refused the peerage which was demanded for Mr. Clarendon.

But no pen can depict her amazement and indignation when she heard Meagles take up the thread of the conversation and utter dark menaces. She could scarcely believe her ears: she listened with suspended breath; her bosom was as motionless and still as if she were a marble statue!

"I mean, sire, that his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales will not fall alone. If he sink beneath the weight of infamy and shame, he will drag down others with him—yes—even though it be his own father."

Such were the words which the Princess Amelia caught: such were the words that her brother's missary dared address to her own father—the king of England!

But the scene which followed was of more ominous significance and my tremendously mysterious import. As Meagles grew bolder: he spoke as if tone of easy defiance to his Majesty and then came the rapidly ex-
cend of

but emphatic sentences concerning the certificate.

The Princess Amelia was stupefied—astounded. Pale as marble, she leant against the door for support. She heard her father sob—and she could not fly to his assistance. Her limbs were paralysed—her very breath was suspended. A dumb, dead bewilderment was upon her: an awful consternation held her powerless—motionless voiceless. Even her eyes did not wink—her lips remained apart—her breast was upheaved and still.

What could the document be that Meagles had produced?—what spell did it exercise over her sire?—what crime or misfortune on his part had endowed it with such appalling influence?

Fleet as lightning did these questions flash through her brain: but how was her imagination to suggest the answers to them?

Hark!—the silence in the next room is now broken again: the King speaks. She listens, as if her life were dependent on catching the words which he utters. He demands that the document be given up to him. Meagles refuses. Nay—he even declares with confidence that its price is a dukedom!

A cold tremor—as if a snake were slowly coiling its slimy folds about her—passed gradually over the form of the Princess: for that her father must have committed some dreadful crime, or that Meagles was the depositor of some tremendous secret respecting the Royal Family, was evident. Otherwise, how would this man have dared not only to bandy words with the King of England—but likewise to dictate his own terms in a tone proving that he had not miscalculated the extent of the terrible influence which he thus wielded over the unhappy monarch.

And now the Princess Amelia heard her sire assent to those conditions nay, even humiliate himself so far as to admit that he must use subterfuge and artifice with his Prime Minister in order to procure the peerage and the pension for Mr. Clarendon.

A death-like sensation came upon the wretched Princess. She loved her father as dearly as every child was devoted to a parent: and the discourse which she overheard had revealed things—or rather excited alarms and apprehensions of so vague, uncertain, most horrible a character that the chill Meagles grave appeared to have seized even her. But this feeling rapidly—for the

yielded to one more intense and excruciating still: for when she thought of the deep humiliation to which her father was reduced—and that father a King—she felt as if red-hot iron were searing her heart and drops of molten lead trickling upon her brain. Then—in order to avoid giving utterance to the hysterical cry which rose to her very lips—she suddenly tore herself away from the door to which her ear had hitherto been rivetted; and, with steps that were staggering and uneven although so rapid, she fled to her own apartment.

Throwing herself upon a sofa, the young Princess burst into an agony of weeping. Torrents of tears now poured forth from the eyes that had hitherto been so hot and dry; and her bosom—that fair virgin breast—heaved with convulsive sobs, as if her heart must break.

But in a few minutes that flood of anguish was followed by the relief which tears invariably afford; and the violence of her affliction subsided. By degrees, however, she experienced a suffocating sensation—a want of the fresh air—and a longing to feel the cold breeze fan her burning brow and her flushed cheeks. Hastily putting on a modest bonnet and a simple scarf lined with furs, the Princess descended to the gardens attached to the Castle. But perceiving some members of the royal household walking in those grounds, and wishing to give way in solitude to the thoughts which oppressed her, she turned her steps in another direction and entered the park.

So modest was her apparel—so mournful was her demeanour—so woe-begone her countenance—and so agitated her walk, that a stranger would never have suspected her to be one of the high-born and envied daughters of England's Royalty.

And, in truth, the young Princess was thoroughly wretched: for her soul was filled with the gloomiest presentiments in regard to her father—her eldest brother—aye, her entire family;—and she could not help thinking, within the profoundest recesses of her own heart, that there was a curse instead of a blessing attendant upon the British crown!

Presently her thoughts settled almost completely upon her eldest brother, the Prince of Wales; and so fully did she become absorbed in contemplating his career and painfully wondering to what ignominious catastrophe it would

probably lead, that she forgot the scene which had ere now taken place at the Castle.

It was while in this deeply reflective mood, that the Princess Amelia suddenly observed an individual leaning in a melancholy attitude against a tree. Tall, well-formed, and handsomely dressed, this person immediately rivetted her gaze: for she felt convinced that it was the object of her thoughts—her brother—George Prince of Wales. His arms were folded across his ample chest—his eyes were fixed on the ground—he was evidently absorbed in deep meditation.

"Ah!" thought the Princess within herself; "I understand the meaning of his presence here! Tortured by suspense, he is waiting for his emissaries, to learn the issue of their interview with our august father. Poor brother! with all his faults I love him well—and more than ever now that I am confident he is unhappy! But at least it will be in my power to relieve him of that anxiety which is wringing his soul at present: yes—I can so far cheer him with the assurance that the peerage will be granted to Mr. Clarendon, and that the existing cause of a cruel embarrassment will therefore be hushed up."

These ideas rushed through the brain of the tender-hearted and amiable Princess in far less time than we have occupied in recording them; and hastily approaching the individual who was leaning against the tree, she threw herself upon his breast, overcome by her feelings—thus making him aware of her presence and her sorrow at the same instant.

The individual started with an amazement which the Princess did not however perceive—for she was now blinded with her tears and suffocated with her sobs. All the features—all the details—all the particulars of the scene which had taken place within the hour, rushed to her mind:—her father's humiliation—Meagles' triumph—the mysterious document—everything sprang into vivid being in her memory. And she knew that her brother was the cause of all the anguish, degradation, and disgrace through which her sire had thus passed: she recollected, moreover, that this same brother it was who had sent his emissaries to threaten, coerce and intimidate that father whom she so fondly loved; and her gentle spirit was wounded sorely—her kind heart was

rent with the cruel paroxysms which were only partially relieved by the torrents of tears that she now shed so abundantly, as she clung to the arms of him who supported her from falling.

"O George, my dearest brother! what have you done?" she exclaimed at length, but in a voice half suffocated with sobs.

"Is it possible that you could have had recourse to menaces in order to compel your father—your King——"

"In the name of heaven, illustrious lady—for that such you are, I gather from your words—be cautious what you say. There is some strange mistake——"

A shriek burst from the lips of the Princess, as she started wildly from the half embrace in which she was held or rather into which she had thrown herself; and casting one searching, penetrating, agonizing look upon the handsome though mournful countenance which now wore an expression of the profoundest respect mingled with a tender interest,—she exclaimed, "just heaven! what have I done?"

And she would have fallen forward on the ground, had not the gentleman caught her in his arms.

But she had fainted!

He threw a rapid look around; not a soul was nigh to render aid or run for succour—the Castle was a mile distant—and there was not even a drop of water near to sprinkle upon the marble brow of the Princess—for such he concluded, from the words she had spoken that she must be.

Kneeling upon the grass, he sustained her in his arms—loosened the scarf lined with furs from about her neck—unfastened the ribands of her bonnet—and thus did all he could, consistently with an honourable delicacy and propriety, to give her air.

Then, as she lay thus motionless and deprived of sense in his arms, he could not help being struck by the loveliness of her countenance and the softly rounded outlines of her figure. Even amidst the deep melancholy which filled his breast, there stole into existence a feeling of the tenderest interest as he thus contemplated the inanimate form of the Princess. Her face, from which all the colour had fled, was so exquisitely sweet and so touchingly beautiful in its death-like rigidity and its marble hue, that it appeared as if the dream of a poetic genius had been wrought into mimic life by the hand of

the statuary. And as the individual who sustained her in his arms gazed on that countenance, a deep, deep sigh rose from the profoundest abyss of his soul: for had any one a few minutes previously assured him that his feelings would be stirred so soon and his heart moved by the beauty of aught in female shape, he would have declared that love for him was as a flower which had faded in his soul—a leaf which had withered—and that naught could re-awaken the subtle passion, nor rekindle its volcanic fire to dart through the ruins it had once filled and scorched!

And now a tender bloom began to re-appear upon the cheeks of the Princess—a deeper tint suffused the lips that were now stirred with the wavering breath of returning animation—her bosom rose and fell slowly, but visibly—and opening her azure orbs she gazed up into the countenance that was bending over her.

At first there was a dull vacancy in that look—but the next moment the pupils of those sweet eyes were lighted up with the resuscitating beams of intelligence,—and recollecting all that had occurred, the Princess said in a faint and tremulous tone, “I thank you, sir, for this kind attention on your part. A mistake—a strange mistake—”

And stopping short, as the reminiscence flashed to her mind that she had thrown herself weeping and sobbing upon the breast of a stranger, she blushed the deepest crimson.

“Your Royal Highness may rest assured that I am a man of honour,” was the earnest and impressive response, as the gentleman delicately and tenderly assisted the Princess to regain her feet; “and the words which fell from your lips ere now shall never be repeated by me. I can well understand how the error occurred—for I am no stranger to the fact that a marvellous resemblance subsists between myself and his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales.”

“So extraordinary a likeness I never beheld till now!” murmured the Princess Amelia, casting a timid look upon the countenance which still wore an expression of extreme mournfulness mingled with a tender interest: then, hastily re-arranging her dress, she said, “Again I thank you, sir, for the courtesy—nay, the generosity of your behaviour towards me. May I request to be made acquainted with the name

of one to whom I shall ever be under a great obligation?”

“Doubtless my romantic history and cruel misfortunes are not altogether unknown ever to a lady so highly placed and so far removed from the world’s ordinary sphere, as your Royal Highness,” said the gentleman, “For a short time was I the object of universal execration. A number of crimes, any one of which was sufficient to stamp a man with unredeemable infamy—”

“Ah! I know you, sir,—and I sincerely, most sincerely sympathise with your misfortunes,” exclaimed the Princess Amelia, a sudden light breaking in upon her memory. “I read your case in the newspapers—and I now recollect full well that mention was made of the extraordinary likeness which you were said to bear to the Royal Family. That the report was indeed true, the incident of this morning has fully proved,” she added, casting down her eyes as a blush once more suffused her charming countenance: but almost instantly looking up again, she observed with a tone and manner of winning artlessness, “Sir Richard Stamford, you are a man of honour—and I need not blush like a guilty thing for an error into which I fell so innocently.”

“Your Royal Highness may look upon the incident which has just passed, as if it had never occurred,” said the baronet.

“Nay—it is not altogether in such a light that I wish to regard it,” exclaimed the Princess: “because your conduct towards me has been too generous and too delicately attentive to permit such ingratitude as forgetfulness would be on my part. If you will become my companion to the Castle, I shall have much pleasure in presenting you to their Majesties—”

“Gracious Princess,” Sir Richard Stamford hastened to observe, “you confer too much honour upon me. With delight shall I attend upon your Royal Highness to the immediate precinct of the regal dwelling: but I crave your pardon if I accompany you not beyond the threshold.”

“Think you, Sir Richard Stamford, that you will be received with a cold and icy ceremony?” exclaimed the warm-hearted Princess. “No—no: I shall frankly and candidly inform my beloved father of the origin of our acquaintance—and he will thank you for your chivalrous behaviour towards his

daughter. Come, Sir Richard Stamford—you shall escort me to the Castle."

And the Princess Amelia, with the most amiable cordiality of manner, but with all the maidenly dignity and graceful propriety of her rank and sex, took the arm which the baronet scarcely dared to offer her.

"Your Royal Highness," he said, as they proceeded slowly towards the Castle, "has honoured me with an invitation which under any circumstances would amount to a command, but which has been given in a tone of such kindness that it were an unpardonable rudeness and a coarse brutality on my part to offer an excuse. Nevertheless, I must incur the risk of your Royal Highness's displeasure——"

"You are incapable of deserving it, Sir Richard Stamford," hastily exclaimed the Princess Amelia. "If you do not wish to proceed beyond the threshold of the Castle, I shall give you credit for entertaining some good reason for declining my invitation—and we shall not be on less friendly terms on that account."

"Every word your Royal Highness utters lays me under a fresh obligation to you," said Sir Richard Stamford. "Permit me, then, to explain myself. My recent misfortunes have produced an effect which cannot be immediately mitigated—and never can be altogether subdued. A few weeks ago—and I was a happy husband enjoying the blessings of a cheerful home and a wife whom I adored; now I am alone in the world—widowed in my love, and with my home a wreck! Impelled by a sense of duty towards society as well as by those feelings of vengeance which the most virtuous cannot altogether crush and annihilate at the bottom of their souls, I pursued my enemies until I sent them to the scaffold. Martin and Ramsey perished by the hand of the public executioner: but at the same moment that the drop fell, launching them into eternity—then also ebbd away the excitement which the proceedings taken against them had kept alive in my mind. A deep despondency supervened—and I felt that its influence was irresistible. I fled from the din of London—I sought the retirement of the environs of Windsor. Here have I dwelt for some days past—and when the weight of thought becomes intolerable, I rush out into the open air—I come hither—and in this park do I wander for hours. Sometimes I fear lest I should go mad: at

others I seem to tremble upon the verge of suicide."

"Great heaven! talk not thus, Sir Richard Stamford," ejaculated the Princess, looking up into his countenance with an expression of such sympathy as a sister might evince towards a well-beloved brother; for she felt herself irresistibly drawn towards that unhappy gentleman whose misfortunes had constituted one of the most extraordinary romances in real life that ever became known to the world.

"I demand the pardon of your Royal Highness," said the baronet. "I am well aware that I ought not to intrude my sorrows upon you! But I was about to ask your Royal Highness whether it be fitting to introduce a man with such a ruined, shattered heart as mine, into the presence of your august parents? Oh! no—no; for the deeper the solitude in which I dwell—the more profound the misanthropy in which I shroud myself—the more inveterate the cynicism which henceforth shall characterise my existence——"

"Sir Richard Stamford, interrupted the princess Amelia, speaking with a gravity which seemed singular not only for her years but likewise for the almost cherub style of beauty which marked her countenance,—“you must allow me to assume the part of a counsellor—an adviser—a friend. I will frankly inform you that when I read in the newspapers the romantic narrative of your sorrows and your wrongs, I conceived a boundless compassion for the man who had sustained such an accumulated weight of misery. Little did I imagine that I should ever encounter the hero of that mournful tragedy. But we have met—and under circumstances forming an appropriate sequence to your wild, wondrous, and touching history. For, at a moment when my own heart was swelling almost to bursting, I mistook you for that brother whose image absorbed all my thoughts—and you checked with a generous, noble, manly warning that outpouring of words which, flowing from my lips, might have conveyed revelations unfitted for any ear save that of a member of the Royal Family. This conduct on your part has made me your debtor—and has likewise augmented the interest which I already experienced in your behalf. Let me then address you as a friend; let me throw aside all affectation, and at once place myself on confidential terms

with you. For although I am but a girl in years—yet in maturity of reflection and in steadiness of thought, I flatter myself that I am a woman. Permit me, therefore, Sir Richard Stamford, to remind you that ideas of misanthropy and cynicism are not suitable to a man of true courage. No one has a right to withdraw himself from the world and turn hermit. If all who are unhappy were to fly into solitude, what would become of society? It would dwindle down into a waste—a wilderness—a desert. No—misanthropy is not the part which God destined human beings to play in this world. You have been sorely tried—woes of no ordinary magnitude have been heaped upon your head. The greater, then, will become the merit of patience—endurance—resignation.”

“This is an angel breathing the sublimest truths in my ears!” exclaimed Sir Richard Stamford; and stopping short—dropping the arm of the Princess—he turned towards her, fixing his ravished, admiring, almost adoring gaze upon her countenance.

“I thank God that he has enabled my lips to utter words which have touched your heart,” said the royal maiden, in a tone of the most holy and most unaffected sincerity. “Were I placed in another sphere,” she continued, after a brief pause, “I should insist that you now accompanied me home—that you would suffer me to introduce you to my parents—that you would take up your abode with us for a few weeks, so that your bruised spirit might receive that anodyne which is found in cheerful society. But all this may not be,” she added, laying her hand gently upon his arm and looking up mournfully into his countenance. “Nevertheless, as the daughter of your King, I have taken it upon myself to tender you my advice—to offer you the consolation which truthful doctrines may impart—”

“And you *have* consoled me, excellent-hearted Princess!” ejaculated the baronet. “Great heavens! to think that the female voice should ever again have had the power to reach a chord in my heart and make it vibrate! Methought that my soul was dead to all the tender sensibilities which woman’s looks or words alone can kindle!”

“For a man to entertain such an opinion of himself, is the worst kind of scepticism, and must be offensive to his Maker,” said the Princess Amelia, in a grave tone; “because it amounts

to a denial of that hope which sustains us in our career, and which is an effluence from the divinity itself.

Again did Sir Richard Stamford gaze in mingled admiration and rapture upon that royal maiden whose character was so natural and without disguise,—whose manners were so impressive, and yet so winning in their almost infantile simplicity,—whose air was dignified, yet attempered by the sweetest feminine timidity—and whose angelic countenance, though tender and languishing, was yet noble in its lineaments and characterised with an expression so purely gentle and confiding.

“Princess,” said the baronet, in a voice deeply moved, “had any man prophesied to me an hour ago that it was possible for mortal tongue to pour solace into my soul, I should have shaken my head in token of incredulity: but had any one whispered in my ear that a daughter of the King would condescend even to trouble herself concerning my sorrows, I should have upbraided him with the astounding folly to which he was giving utterance. And yet, my God! both predictions, had they been made, would by this time have received their fulfilment—and on my knees—Oh! on my knees, royal lady—must I pour forth the heartfelt gratitude, which I experience for the angel-part which you have performed towards me!”

And, reckless whether there were, thousands of eyes to behold the action Sir Richard Stamford sank down at the feet of the Princess Amelia—took her hand—pressed it to his lips—and wept over it. Sweeping a half terrified glance around—then, bending her looks upon the baronet, when assured that no prying eyes beheld them—the Princess felt such strange and undefinable emotions stirring within her bosom, that she could not immediately give utterance to the words she wished to speak for the purpose of commanding him to rise from his suppliant posture. New intuitions appeared suddenly to spring up in her soul: and, when she did recover the power of language, it was in a deeply melting tone that she, said “Rise, sir—rise—you may be observed—and what will be thought of us both!”

Recalled to a sense of the inconsiderateness of that action to which however a deep and fervent sense of gratitude had impelled him,—Sir Richard Stamford sprang to his feet: then,

when his eyes again met those of the Princess Amelia, he saw that she was blushing deeply. For the very words which she had last uttered had seemed inscrutably and mysteriously to link and associate themselves with the new feelings which were springing up in her bosom, and this germinating love at first sight—for such indeed it was—produced vague alarms, soft misgivings, and tender apprehensions never known before!

"Here we must part, Sir Richard," she said after they had walked on for a little while in profound silence.

"Part!—what—so soon?" he exclaimed: and had death been the penalty for giving utterance of those words, he would have uttered them all the same—so unwitting, so improvised, so involuntary was the ejaculation.

"Yes—I must, return to his Majesty," said the Princess, now suddenly recollecting the incidents that had sent her forth from the Castle to cool her burning brow in the park—those incidents which had gradually glided out of her memory in proportion as her interview with the Baronet became more intensely interesting.

"Farewell, then, generous-hearted Princess!" cried Sir Richard Stamford. "No words can convey all the illimitable gratitude which I experience towards you. But let me give your Royal Highness this assurance—that henceforth, when I wish to shape in my imagination the angels that are in heaven, I shall think of you."

Thus speaking, he raised her hand to his lips—kissed it fervently—and then hurried away.

The Princess Amelia watched his retreating form for nearly a minute, at the expiration of which she turned, with a profound sigh, towards the nearest avenue leading to the Castle.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

CAMILLA.

IMMEDIATELY after their interview with the King, Tim Meagles and Lady Lade went back to the hotel—paid the bill—ordered the horses—and returned at a smart pace to London.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon when they reached the metropolis. The Amazon then hastened to her own home, to satisfy her doting and purblind husband with some ex-

cuse to account for her absence; while her paramour repaired to Carlton House.

Meagles found the Prince of Wales alone in his own chamber, not the slightest step towards a reconciliation between himself and Mrs. Fitzherbert having been made by either party: nor indeed, after the understanding to which the heir-apparent had come with his friend and counsellor, did he for an instant desire that the quarrel should be patched up. On the contrary, he thought that it would lead all the more easily to that complete rupture which his intensely selfish nature had contemplated and which Meagles had promised to carry into effect.

In order, therefore, to avoid the possibility of meeting Mrs. Fitzherbert, the Prince of Wales had shut himself up in his own room ever since the quarrel on the night of the ball; and during this interval he had divided the time between solitary drinking and feasting his imagination with the charms of Mrs. Brace's beautiful seamstress, Camilla Morton.

The Prince was overjoyed when Meagles, on appearing before him, at once put him out of suspense by declaring that the peerage would be granted to Mr. Clarendon.

"And how the devil did you manage it, my dear Tim?" demanded his Royal Highness, chuckling heartily.

"I thought it was an agreement between us that you should ask me no questions relative to the means which I might employ," said Meagles, flinging himself upon a seat and slashing his boot with his riding-whip.

"Ah! truly—and so it was," exclaimed the heir-apparent. "Then you saw the King?"

"Yes—we had a long chat with the old gentleman," observed Meagles, speaking of his Majesty in a free and easy, off-hand kind of a fashion.

"We!" ejaculated the Prince. "And who the devil went with you, then?"

"The Amazon—only the Amazon," answered Tim, quite coolly.

"Nonsense! you are humbugging me!" cried the heir-apparent.

"I assure you that it is truth," said Meagles, with a smile. "Lady Lade not only went with me—but likewise appeared before the King in her usual garb."

"And what in the name of everything sublime or ridiculous did our revered parent say?" demanded the Prince.

"Only that my wife—as his Majesty took her to be—was a monstrous fine woman," returned Meagles. "But let me tell you that without the Amazon I might not have succeeded at all. She menaced at one moment—coaxed at another—then reasoned—then pleaded—and in fine helped me considerably," he added, thus exaggerating the real truth in order to prevent the Prince from suspecting that he was in reality possessed of the Lightfoot certificate and had used it at Windsor.

"Capital!—capital!" ejaculated the heir-apparent, highly delighted at the idea of Lady Lade appearing with her huntress's garb in the presence of the ceremonious old King. "And when is this peerage to be granted?"

"In a week or ten days: and in the meantime you are to hold your tongue about it. His Majesty is going to manage it very cleverly: he means to wheedle Pitt out of it by dint of sheer artifice;—and therefore if a hint, or even the ghost of a rumour should get abroad in the interval——"

"Not a sentence shall fall from my lips, Tim, until the proper time," exclaimed the Prince. "If I hear or see anything of the Miss Clarendons, I will manage to appease them for the present somehow or another. And now that you have contrived to settle one thing for me—for I consider it to be as good as done—when shall we set about the other?"

"To-morrow, my dear Prince," replied Meagles. "About two o'clock in the afternoon I shall make my appearance in a genteel suit of black and solicit an immediate interview with Mrs. Fitzherbert. I cannot of course say how long our parley may last: but this I promise your Royal Highness—that she will not sleep beneath your roof to-morrow night."

"Bravo, Tim!" ejaculated the Prince. "You are really an excellent fellow. By the bye, I have not found the papers, you know——"

"I dare say they will turn up some day or another," interrupted Meagles, rising from his seat. "Farewell for the present. To-morrow afternoon I shall pay my respects to your Royal Highness again—the moment I have made all necessary arrangements with Mrs. Fitzherbert.

"I shall be anxiously expecting you, Tim," said the Prince, extending his hand to his friend.

Meagles took his departure; and the heir-apparent, after cogitating for some

minutes upon the successful issue of the trip to Windsor, penned a brief note to Mrs. Brace, informing her that he intended to pay her a visit in the evening and that he should pass the night at her house provided she could induce the beautiful Camilla Morton to share his couch.

Having despatched this letter to the accommodating milliner, his Royal Highness lay down upon a sofa to indulge in a doze until dinner-time. A sort of half-waking dreamy slumber came slowly upon him—and, while having his eyes shut, he pursued a continuous train of reflections,—wondering whether he should really ever wear the English crown—and if he did, how the people could be such fools as to let him—and if he did not, what it might be that would prevent him—whether a revolution at home, or the propagandism of republicanism from France. Then he thought of the numerous proofs which the history of the past and the occurrences of the present afforded of the rapid decay of monarchical institutions; and he began to calculate how long the system was likely to last in this country. Ultimately he indulged in a tolerably hearty chuckle at the despicable folly of that long-eared jackass John Bull, who submits to be pillaged and plundered on all sides with so good a grace;—and having thus vented his mirth at the expense of those who were one day to become his subjects—or rather his slaves—he went off into a sound sleep, from which Germain awoke him at about eight o'clock.

This Leviathan of voluptuousness, profligacy, and scoundrelism,—this diabolical miscreant whose statue stands in Trafalgar Square as a flagrant insult to the people of Great Britain, and a shame and a scandal to civilisation itself,—this Prince of Wales, having dressed himself for dinner, sate down alone to the repast, and by means of the bottle whiled away a couple of hours agreeably enough in his estimation.

He then muffled himself in his cloak—quitted Carlton House by the private staircase leading from his own bed-chamber—and passed hastily into St. James's Square. The door of that department of the milliner's establishment was speedily opened; and in a few minutes he was seated with Mrs. Brace in the little parlour to which allusion has been so frequently made in former chapters of our narrative.

To this lady the Prince speedily communicated the satisfactory intelligence that her advice had been adopted in respect to the means of propitiating Mr. Clarendon when he should come to know his daughter's shame; and the milliner was well pleased by the intelligence thus conveyed. She then spoke of the issue of the adventure at the ball, the failure of the Prince's attempt upon Lady Desborough having been already made known by him in a note which he had written to Mrs. Brace on the ensuing morning. His Royal Highness did not however at present seem in a humour to discuss that subject but, hastily shifting the discourse, he demanded whether she had any good news for him respecting Miss Camilla Morton.

"I will tell you very candidly," answered Mrs. Brace, "that I am at a loss to comprehend this young girl. It was Sunday evening, you remember, that you supped with me, Camilla being present. All Monday I saw little of her as I was much occupied during the day—and on the night I was at Carlton House, as you are aware. But yesterday I observed that there was some alteration in her manner. She either beheld me with an unwonted degree of timidity, or with suspicion—I know not which, I spoke kindly to her—she answered me in a tone that struck me as being cold and with an air that seemed reserved. Throughout yesterday she was thus peculiar in her manner; and to-day it has been the same," added the milliner: for it was on the Wednesday evening that the Prince and herself were thus conversing together.

"Think you, my dear Fanny, inquired his Royal Highness, "that she suspects who I am?"

"Decidedly not," responded Mrs. Brace. "If she did, she would not hesitate to tell me so—for, with all her natural timidity, she is a girl of a frank, artless, and ingenuous disposition."

"It was thus that I also read her character, on Sunday night," said the Prince. "Well, if she do not suspect who I am, what the devil misgiving can she entertain?"

"I know not. Perhaps she has overheard some incautious whisper on the part of the senior girls," added Mrs. Brace, in a musing tone. "There is one—Rachel Forrester—who will soon become a mother: and yet her position is not apparent—not is she likely to commit any indiscretion in the pre-

sence of Camilla. In fact, I am quite bewildered what to make of the girl," exclaimed the milliner petulantly.

"Then you have not been able to arrange any plan——"

"Nothing at all," interrupted Mrs. Brace, laconically. "The truth is, my dear Prince," she observed, after a brief pause and lowering her tone "Camilla is an orphan and totally friendless—and consequently there is not the same necessity to act in a slow, cautious, careful manner as when a young girl who has parents to fly to is concerned. Now, do you understand me?"

"I should be a perfect idiot if I did not," answered the heir-apparent. "You mean, my dear Fanny, that you leave Camilla Morton entirely to my management——"

"Yes: to your tender mercies," said the milliner, darting upon him a look full of significancy.

The Prince of Wales regarded his watch. It was close upon eleven o'clock. The young ladies had all retired to rest: but it was too early to think of putting his diabolical scheme into execution. He accordingly resolved to wait until near midnight; and Mrs. Brace covered the table with all the wines, spirits, and liqueurs that were likely to tempt the palate of his Royal Highness."

That by the aid of curacoa-punch and some delectable conversation with the handsome milliner, the Prince whiled away the time until midnight.

"Now, my dear Fanny, I shall retire—I hope to paradise," said the heir-apparent smiling at his own awful blasphemy. "But should any accident disappoint me—any unexpected event constrain me to beat a retreat—I shall find my way to your chamber, Fanny, he added, caressing her plump cheek with his hand."

"Indeed, my good friend," exclaimed Mrs. Brace, blushing and looking confused, "I must beg and implore you to leave me unmolested under any circumstances——"

"Well, well," interrupted the Prince, smiling significantly: "let us hope that my success with Camilla will be such as to render it unnecessary for me to seek a bed elsewhere. But I understand you, my cunning friend—you have a little intrigue of your own in progress to-night—eh? There, now—you need not blush nor cast down your eyes: I am well aware that you are not immaculate—and indeed I have

no right to question you as to your proceedings. So give me a taper and conduct me to the door of Camilla's room."

Mrs. Brace said not a word: but, with the crimson hue still upon her cheeks, she rose—lighted a wax candle and led the way noiselessly along the passage into that division of her premises which looked upon St. James's Square: for the sleeping-rooms of the young ladies were all, for obvious reasons, in this latter compartment of the spacious establishment.

Having ascended two flights of stairs, Mrs. Brace gave the Prince the candle—whispered the number of a certain room—and then rapidly withdrew.

His Royal Highness advanced along a passage which was so thickly carpeted that even if he had trodden as heavily as a cart-horse the sounds of his steps would have been deadened by the rich fabric. In a few moments he reached the room which had been described to him; and the door yielded to his hand. But on entering a small ante-chamber, he carefully closed it again behind him.

This ante-chamber was only a few feet square—just large enough to contain a bath. Facing the entrance by which the Prince had made his way hither, was a second door; and from beneath it as well as through the key-hole glimmered a feeble light. It was evident, therefore, that a candle burnt in Camilla Morton's room: and the Prince accordingly extinguished the wax light which he carried in his hand.

He now stopped down and peeped through the key-hole.

The young girl had not retired to rest. Seated at a table, on which her elbow rested—and with her head supported languidly upon her hand—she had a book before her: but, though her eyes were fixed upon it, she evidently was not reading. Her entire attitude as well as the expression of her countenance denoted deep thought. She was plunged in a profound reverie: and the subject of her meditations was not of a joyous description—for on each pale cheek a tear glistened in the feeble rushlight.

She had not as yet made the slightest preparation for retiring to rest. Her hair was still in the graceful bands in which she wore it, and in which arrangement it set off her intellectually beautiful and sweetly pensive countenance. Her deep mourning dress displayed the dazzling fairness of her

complexion to its greatest advantage, and likewise developed the perfect symmetry of her sylphlike form.

For several minutes did the royal voluptuary contemplate his intended victim by means of the key-hole; and the longer he gazed upon her, the more ardently did he burn to possess her.

And that she would become his prey beyond all possibility of salvation or rescue, he did not doubt: for well aware was he that every chamber in this department of the milliner's establishment was so skilfully and artfully arranged that no screams to which the tongue might give vent in one room could be heard in another. Besides, even if it were not so, the inmates of Brace's abode were not of a character likely to afford the succour which even the acutest lamentation or the most rending entreaties might implore.

And with truth did we observe that the reverie of Camilla Morton was far from felicitous: for she *did* entertain suspicions not only with regard to the respectability of Mrs. Brace's establishment, but likewise concerning the good faith and sincerity of the milliner herself. The incidents of the preceding Sunday evening had opened the eyes of the young girl, artless and confiding as she was. The attempt of the guest, whom she only knew as Mr. Harley, to kiss her hand had shocked her for the moment; and the indignant glance which she threw upon him expressed all the dignity of her maidenhood smarting under an insult. But on retiring to her own chamber, the suspicion already engendered in her mind kindled into the worst fears; and her sleepless pillow was moistened with the orphan's bitter weeping. No wonder was it, then, that Mrs. Brace had since observed an alteration in her manner;—and now—on this Wednesday night on which we find her plunged in deep thought at that midnight hour, and in the solitude of her own room—she is deliberating what course she ought to pursue.

Alas! alas!—now is it that the poor girl experiences all the loneliness of her position in the world. Her parents have been snatched away from her: she has not a relative, to her knowledge, upon the face of the earth. Like the keen and cutting blast of December blowing upon the naked form of the shivering mendicant, comes the piercing and icy sense of her utter isolation to the heart of the young orphan girl.

In Mrs. Brace she had hoped to find a mother. Pure, innocent, unsuspecting, and confiding, she beheld a matronly kindness in the woman's manner which speedily won her naturally warm and inexperienced heart. The rigid decorum which *outwardly* reigned amongst the young ladies led her to regard *them* with a sisterly affection. She was therefore at first completely happy—or rather as happy as a maiden who had so recently lost her parents could possibly hope to be. But suddenly the film fell from her eyes—the veil was torn rudely away—and one little incident threw all her ideas and sentiments respecting the house and its inmates into another channel. Receiving as it were new intuitions, she now recognised the impropriety of Mrs. Brace's conduct in sending her with a note to Lord Florimel: and she remembered how intently the eyes of Mr. Harley were fixed upon her at supper on the Sunday evening. In spite of her purity—in spite of her artlessness—in spite of her ignorance on many matters, the maiden had obtained a glimmering of the truth; and the exercise of her reason soon developed her comprehensive faculties to an extent sufficient to produce the conviction that the milliner meditated anything rather than a mother's part towards her.

Behold her, then, seated in the solitude of her chamber and at this midnight hour, revolving in her imagination the best means of quitting Mrs. Brace's establishment as soon as possible. She did not like to reveal with abruptness the motive which prompted her to take so decisive a step; for she thought within herself that if her suspicions should happen to be unfounded in respect to the milliner, how grieved she would be at having proclaimed them. And yet she must make up her mind speedily—it was a matter admitting not of delay—and all timidity or hesitation must be conquered in order to accomplish a duty. Camilla, then, determined to quit the house on the ensuing morning: already had she acted with weakness in remaining there three whole days after the incident of Sunday evening!

Such were the thoughts occupying her imagination, when a sound, as if the handle of the door were turning, fell upon her ears.

She started from her seat—the door opened—and Mr. Harley stood before her!

A scream burst from the maiden's lips; then, the first feeling of terror passing away in a moment, the warm blood of indignation surged up to her cheeks—her brow—her very ears!

"Adorable girl," exclaimed the Prince, extending his arms towards her,—“look not thus angrily upon me! Blame not me—blame your beauty which possesses irresistible fascinations.”

The temporary courage with which anger had armed the orphan, abandoned her suddenly as these words fell upon her ears with the effect of a shock; and sinking up a seat, she burst into tears.

"My dearest Camilla," exclaimed the Prince closing the door behind him,—“this is but a sorry reception you give me. Hear me, my angel—hear me declare that I adore you—that I will never cease to love you—that I will do all I can to render you happy. Come—permit me to kiss away the tears from those beauteous eyes—”

"Begone, sir!" ejaculated the maiden, a burning sense of outrage restoring to her the courage which she had lost. "Begone, sir!" she cried, starting from the chair and pointing towards the door.

"One word, Camilla—only one word!" said the Prince, quite prepared for this opposition to his desires.

"Not a syllable, sir!" was the response, delivered even in a stern tone.

"Nay—then you must hear me perforce," exclaimed his Royal Highness, leaning his back against the door.

Camilla, astonished at this hardness—for she could scarcely have believed that any man would have been guilty of such cowardly brutality towards a defenceless female—gazed upon the Prince with a stupefaction which, coming suddenly upon her, struck her speechless and motionless.

"My dear girl," resumed the Prince, hastily taking advantage of the pause, "you must be made to understand how matters exist between us. The truth is, then that you are revishly beautiful, and I am desperately enamoured of you; you are at present nothing but a poor seamstress, and I will elevate you into a fine lady: instead of plying the needle all day you shall ride in a carriage—have servants to wait upon you—and dwell in a nice house of your own. All this will I do for you, Camilla—if you only consent to my wishes. And if not, then shall I compel your stubborn virtue to surrender:

for your strength against mine will be as that of the infant child in the grasp of a giant—and to your screams no succouring voice will respond."

His Royal Highness paused in the expectation that Miss Morton would vouchsafe some reply : but though her lips were apart, yet they did not even quiver as if about to speak—a spell seemed to hold her tongue in thrall. And, with eyes that almost glared wildly, did she continue to gaze upon the countenance of him who had thus deliberately made known to her his fiendish resolves : but her manner—her air—her looks were those of a young creature on whom a tremendous consternation had fallen, paralyzing every organ—stupefying every sense—retaining every faculty in abeyance.

Gloatingly over her slight but exquisitely modelled figure, wandered the eyes of the Prince ; and although the body of her dress was so modestly fashioned, that not even a glimpse could be obtained of her bosom, yet did the shape of the closely-fitting corsage afford an external indication of the firmness of those globes which imagination could not err in depicting of snowy whiteness.

"Sweetest—dearest—loveliest girl," exclaimed the Prince, maddened with desire, as he glanced from Camilla's fascinating form to the bed which stood near,—"delay not in rendering me completely happy—and my life shall be devoted to your service !"

At that instant the girl awoke as it were from the stupefaction of a dream to complete consciousness—and with the vividness of lightning did a thought strike her.

"Mr. Harley," she said, forcing herself even to smile faintly, "you expect too easy a conquest—and you will not value it."

"Oh ! this is indeed an unexpected bliss—to hear you talk thus—to find that you do not repulse me any longer !" exclaimed the Prince, intoxicated with delight. "Camilla—sweetest Camilla——"

"If you really love me, Mr. Harley," said the young girl, bending down her looks, while her cheeks became flushed with the deepest crimson,—"you will retire immediately—and to-morrow I shall be happy to listen to you——"

"No—no—we cannot separate thus, dear creature ejaculated his Royal Highness. "I beseech you—I implore

you to render me completely happy this night——"

"Leave me, then, for half-an-hour—twenty minutes—or even ten minutes," interrupted Camilla, speaking in a low tone but with rapid utterance. "Have pity upon my shame—my confusion——"

"Yes—for ten minutes will I leave you, sweetest girl," said the Prince, imagining that she did not choose to lay aside her apparel in his presence. "One kiss first—only one kiss as a foretaste of the indescribable joys——"

"No—not now—not now !" cried the orphan hysterically, as he approached her with outstretched arms. "If I must surrender myself to you, let it be in total obscurity—utter darkness——"

"It shall be as you desire," exclaimed the Prince, sweeping his eyes around the small but neatly-furnished chamber to assure himself that there was no second door by which the beauteous bird might take wing into a place of security : then, satisfied that escape was impossible and that she was completely in his power, he said, "Ten minutes only, my angel—ten minutes of mortal delay—and at the expiration of the interval, I shall return to find you ready to clasp me in your arms."

And glancing significantly towards the couch, he quitted the room, retiring into the ante-chamber.

The moment he had crossed the threshold, Camilla locked the door behind him and extinguished the light.

Then, without an instant's delay, the heroic girl noiselessly but speedily commenced the execution of the plan which had struck her as the only alternative to be adopted for the purpose of rescuing herself from the power of a man so resolutely bent upon sacrificing her to his brutal passions.

Armed with a desperate courage—that courage which could alone have prompted her pure soul to have recourse to the stratagem of appearing to yield to the villain's wishes in order to induce him to quit the room—Camilla Morton addressed herself to the task which she had in hand. Stripping the sheets from the bed, she rolled them up in a suitable manner and fastened them together : then she took the scissors which were suspended to a riband beneath her apron, and in a few minutes the bed-curtains were cut down. The window-drapery was next called into requisition ; and with

all these materials, Camilla speedily made a long, stout, and efficient rope.

The ten minutes had now expired—and the Prince knocked impatiently at the door. But so lightly had the young girl moved about the room—so cautiously had she conducted her operations—so skilfully had she hushed even the sounds of the scissors, that the heir-apparent entertained not the slightest suspicion of her design or the faintest idea of her proceedings. His desires—heightened by the gloating revels of his own sensual imagination—alone rendered him impatient: for he pictured to himself the sweet virgin charms, which he conceived to be by this time divested of their apparel, in readiness to be offered up as a rich banquet to his salacious appetite.

Impatiently, then, did he knock at the door; and the sweet voice of the orphan murmured from the other side, "Only another minute, Mr. Harley, and you may enter!"

The Prince was in raptures: he already felt as if he were standing upon the threshold of paradise. But—Ah! all in a moment a sound as of a window opening met his ears. With suspended breath he listened: yes—it was a window being lifted up—and within that room too! Holy God! what did it mean?—could the young girl be meditating suicide?

Horrified by the thought, his Royal Highness burst the door open. There was no light in the room;—of that he was already aware, since he had vainly applied his eyes to the key-hole on quitting the chamber for the prescribed ten minutes. But the moon shone brightly into the room through the open casement.

A cry of horror burst from the lips of the Prince as the truth became suddenly revealed to him. Springing to the window, he looked forth—and his brain reeled with horror as he beheld the orphan descending from that dizzy height of two storeys into what appeared, as he glanced down, to be a dark abyss below.

A sensation of sickness seized upon him—a vertigo sprang whirlingly up in his head—he clapped his hand to his brow, and, staggering back, would have fallen on the floor had he not leant against the table which had been drawn up close to the window in order that the rope might be fastened to one of its legs.

Recovering himself almost immediately, the Prince looked forth again—

and his eyes met the upturned countenance of the orphan girl as she paused to rest her light feet for a single instant on the projecting wood-work overhanging the front-door. The moon shone as though all its effulgence were poured upon the face of Camilla—that beauteous face on every lineament of which was depicted the noble heroism of a virgin resolute in saving her honour or perishing in the attempt.

"Camilla—sweet Camilla—dearest Camilla," murmured the Prince in a tone of almost anguished entreaty, as the rapid glance which he threw around the Square showed him that no one was nigh to behold this tremendous scene: "remain there, I implore you, until I come down to receive you in my arms!"

But, darting up at him a look full of indescribable contempt and scorn—for the disposition of the brave girl was too noble to harbour hatred—she once more trusted her light aerial form to the rope, and glided in safety upon the pavement of St. James's Square.

The Prince of Wales beheld the issue of the heroic deed, and then breathed more freely—for the danger that the orphan would be dashed to pieces and her death traced to his persecution of her, had suddenly passed away. Considerably relieved in one sense, but bitterly disappointed and chagrined in another, he hastily drew up the rope and closed the window: then, after a few moment's deliberation with himself whether he should arouse Mrs. Brace to acquaint her with what had occurred or whether he should return to Carlton House and send her a note with full particulars in the morning, he decided upon the latter course. For he remembered the amorous milliner had some little intrigue of her own in progress; and he therefore thought it better not to disturb her.

He was turning away from the chamber whence Camilla Morton had so strangely and desperately escaped, when something white upon the carpet attracted his notice; and as the object resembled a letter, he picked it up. And a letter it was—doubtless dropped accidentally by the maiden in the hurry of what may be almost literally termed her precipitate flight.

Curiosity prompted the Prince of Wales to examine the note by the light of the moon, which was shining so powerfully that it made the atmosphere resemble a halo of transparent

quicksilver : but the instant that his eyes fell on the address of that letter he started as if a viper had suddenly bitten him.

The letter dropped from his hand—and this incident appeared to recall him to himself. Picking it up again, he thrust it into his breast—and then quitted the apartment with a gloom upon his countenance darker than the obscurity of the ante-chamber which he traversed or the corridor into which he thence passed.

Groping his way to the staircase, the Prince of Wales lost no time in departing from the house where in addition to being thoroughly baffled by Camilla's heroic flight he had just received a severe shock from the glimpse which he had caught of the address on the outside of the letter.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

ANOTHER INCIDENT OF THE SAME NIGHT.

The reader will not require to be told that it was no ordinary amount of courage which had sustained Camilla Morton throughout the desperate proceeding which she adopted to save her honour from the libidinous profligate by whom it was menaced. But the instant she touched the pavement with her feet—the moment that her safety was assured and the tremendous gulf passed—a powerful reaction took place in her mind, and she burst into a flood of tears. Her limbs suddenly appeared to fail her—and scarcely had she dragged herself round the corner of the adjacent street leading from St. James's Square into Pall Mall, when she was compelled to lean against some railings for support.

At this moment a man and a woman passed that way ; but beholding a genteelly-dressed young girl without bonnet, cloak, or scarf, and apparently convulsed with grief, they stopped and spoke to her,

"What ails you, Miss?" inquired the woman, assuming as pleasing and mild a tone of voice as possible—which was not very difficult, by the bye, inasmuch as her tones were naturally far from disagreeable.

Camilla raised her eyes the moment those words; pronounced by one of her own sex, met her ears : and encoun-

tering the pale but rather pretty face of a young woman who looked kindly upon her, she became animated with hope and confidence.

"I have just escaped from the power of some one who menaced me with violence and outrage," she said, in a hasty and excited tone ; "and I implore you to see me to a place of safety. I have but little money about me at this moment ; but I possess ample means of procuring funds to-morrow—"

"Well, you take the young lady along with you," said the man ; "and I'll just go about the little business I have in hand."

Camilla started at the roughness of the voice which thus sounded on her ears and which formed so disagreeable a contrast with that of the woman ; nor was she reassured when, on glancing at the man's countenance, she observed it was villanous-looking in the extreme.

The woman instantaneously perceived the effect thus produced upon the young lady, and hastened to exclaim, "My husband is a rough diamond, Miss—but he is a true one for all that. A more generous-hearted man never broke bread, I can assure you."

"And I wouldn't injure a fly, Miss," added the man, concealing behind his back the huge club which he held in one hand, and thrusting down with the other the butt-end of a pistol that peeped out of his pocket. "But I'll leave you to my missus, young lady—and she'll take as much care of you as if she was your own natural parent."

Thus speaking, the man made a sort of bow, and hurried away.

"Come, Miss—and I will take you to my lodging which isn't very far off," said the woman. "My husband is a cattle-drover, you must know, and is going to drive some beasts to Smithfield Market presently. That's why we are out so late—or rather so early in the morning. I was going with him : but now I shall have more pleasure in placing you in safety."

The woman spoke with such an air of candour, honesty, and sincerity that she succeeded in removing from Camilla's mind the disagreeable impression which the sinister countenance, rough voice, and coarse manners of her companion had made upon it : and the young lady, therefore, no longer hesitated to accompany her. But before they moved away from the spot, the woman took off her cloak and insisted that Camilla should wrap herself up in it ; and as the garment had a hood to

it, the maiden was thoroughly protected from the cold.

This proof of kindness won Camilla's entire confidence; and away she sped with her new friend.

* * * * *

We must now return once more to the interior of Mrs. Brace's house.

It was nearly one o'clock—twenty minutes had elapsed since the flight of Camilla and the departure of the Prince—and the milliner slept soundly, little dreaming what momentous incidents had taken place beneath her roof that night.

A light burnt upon the toilette-table in her bed-chamber; and the embers of a fire were smouldering in the grate.

The curtains were drawn completely round the couch, whence came the slow and steady respiration of *two* persons; for, in plain truth, the milliner was sleeping in the arms of a lover.

Who he was matters not at present. It was nearly one o'clock in the morning, we said—and a profound silence reigned throughout the establishment.

—But suddenly this solemn stillness was broken by some one stumbling on the stairs: and Mrs. Brace started up in alarm. Her companion slept on, undisturbed by the sound—and she did not choose to awake him: for it struck her at the instant that the noise which had aroused her must be caused by the Prince of Wales who, in spite of the injunction she had given him, was groping his way to her chamber. Such was Mrs. Brace's impression.

She listened as she sate up in the bed—and now, distinctly as she could count the beating of her palpitating heart, did she hear foot-steps stealthily approach the door.

Convinced that it was his Royal Highness who having no doubt failed in his attempt elsewhere was resolved to share her couch,—and angry to think that she could not be allowed to enjoy her own amour in tranquillity and privacy,—Mrs. Brace got up—opened the door—and immediately found herself face to face with an individual who unceremoniously advanced into the chamber.

The light from the toilette-table fell upon his countenance—and, to her unspeakable horror, she recognised the Magsman, her husband!

"Well, my love, I come to see you at all hours, you observe," he said, chucking her under the chin.

"What in the name of heaven do you want now?" demanded the wretched woman, impetuously dashing down his hand with her own. "If it be money, name the sum and the place whither it is to be sent—but leave me this moment!" she added, frightened almost to death lest her lover should awake.

"Now, don't be flurried, my love," said the Magsman, with the most provoking coolness: "for you know very well that I am of rather an obstinate disposition; and therefore the more impatient you are to get rid of me, the longer will be my visit. But I don't hesitate to set your mind at ease on one thing—which is that I'm not in any particular want of blunt at this moment."

"Then what do you require," demanded Mrs. Brace, not daring to look towards the bed for fear the ruffian should suspect she had a companion there and should treat him with as little ceremony but in as extortionate a manner as he did the Prince of Wales on that evening when his Royal Highness was concealed behind the curtain in the milliner's parlour.

"What do I require?" repeated Joe Warren: "why—it will take me a few minutes to describe——"

"Then why not come to-morrow evening—or write to me?" exclaimed Mrs. Brace, grasping at the hope that the suggestions would prove satisfactory and induce him to leave her.

"You're a fool, Fanny," returned the Magsman, laconically. "How the devil do you suppose that I can go walking about London of an evening, after escaping out of Newgate and having no end of rewards offered for my apprehension? No—no old gal—that won't do, I can tell you. The middle of the night is the time for me—until I get a free pardon."

"A free pardon!" ejaculated Mrs. Brace, who was standing all this while in her night-dress and shivering alike with cold and apprehension. "You cannot dream of such a thing! Who is to obtain a free pardon for you?"

"Yourself, my dear," responded the Magsman; "and it was to consult you thereupon that I paid you this visit to night."

"I obtain you a free pardon!—consult *me*!" exclaimed the amazed

and bewildered milliner: "you must either be mad or joking—and surely this is not the hour to make a jest of people."

"By Satan! it is no jest, I can tell you!" ejaculated Warren. "Come, listen attentively for a few minutes, and our business can be soon settled. I'm sorry to keep you standing in the cold, my love," added the fellow with a leer: "but unless you like to return to your bed and admit me——"

"Go on—go on," cried Mrs. Brace, petulantly; "what have you to say? I am all attention. Speak!"

"Well—you know, in the first place, that there's no end of charges against me, and ever so many rewards offered for my apprehension," resumed the Magsman: "and you have no doubt guessed before this that I had a hand in upsetting the Government van into the Devil's Punch-bowl and letting loose the convicts. But it wasn't out of any love for the whole lot of them, but merely to restore my friends the Big Beggarman and Briggs to freedom—Well, such a complication of things hanging over my head, makes it unpleasant—very unpleasant, I can assure you, my dear: and my two friends that I have just named to you—one of whom, the Beggarman, had the honour of paying his respects to you at the house one night——"

"Cease this bantering tone—and speak seriously and to the point," said the milliner, sharply: and all this while she wondered how it was that her lover had not awakened—or, if he were aroused, how he could remain so silent in the presence of such a strange scene.

"I'm coming to the point as quick as I can," said the Magsman. "In fact, I was just going to tell you that my two friends, the Beggarman and Briggs, feel themselves as much put out as I do by having to play at hide-and-seek about London, and not being to go back to our usual haunts. And then there's Lizzy Marks—my young woman, you know, who called upon you about the Newgate affair—she doesn't feel herself quite comfortable either: for the runners are looking after her as well as me and my other two pals. And therefore we have all come to a determination to get a free pardon; and if that can't be done, we shall be satisfied if the Home Secretary will withdraw the offers of reward for our capture, and just give the Bow Street functionaries a hint to look

another way when they chance to see any of us coming along."

You must be mad to think that I have the means of performing one hundredth part of all this!" cried Mrs. Brace who had listened with poignant impatience to her husband's explanations. "I know what you mean—I understand whose assistance you fancy that I can obtain in your behalf——"

"And by heaven! *he* shall assist!" ejaculated the Magsman, ferociously. "Come—write me a certificate, or acknowledgment or whatever you may choose to call it, in precisely the terms which I shall dictate; and then I'll try whether I can't make his Royal Highness——"

"Hush! the very walls have ears," said the milliner, in an imploring tone. "What do you require me to write?"

"An acknowledgment that you are the Prince's mistress," answered the Magsman.

"Silence!—begone!" almost screamed the wretched woman, driven to despair.

"Damnation! do you dare me outright?" exclaimed the Magsman, in a ferocious tone: then, drawing a pistol from his pocket, he said, "By Satan! you shall do as I command you—or——"

"Mercy! mercy!" moaned the milliner, falling upon her knees and clasping her hands with an air of passionate entreaty.

"Don't be a fool and no harm will happen to you," said the Magsman. "I don't want your life—it's no use to me: but I will have what I ask for—a written acknowledgment that you've been unfaithful to me, your lawful husband—and that his Royal Highness——"

Be silent, I command—I implore—I beseech you!" cried Mrs. Brace, in a tone of stifling agony.

"Then give me the paper—get up from your knees and write it at once——"

"No—never—never!" exclaimed the milliner. "You are mad to ask it—you must kill me first——"

"By Satan! I will too," interrupted the Magsman ferociously, as he presented the pistol at his wife.

A shriek burst from the lips of the affrighted woman: but at the same instant—quick as the eye can wink—a man sprang from behind the curtain of the bed—dashed the pistol from the ruffian's hand—and, bounding past

him towards the toilette-table, extinguished the light.

All this was the work of a moment, and the room was suddenly involved in total darkness. Indeed, with such rapidity was the whole proceeding accomplished that the Magsman did not even catch the faintest glimpse of the countenance of the individual who had so abruptly and unexpectedly emerged from the bed.

Fortunately the pistol did not explode—or serious injury, if not death, might have been the result.

"Villain! attempt no violence—or, by heaven! it shall be a struggle of life and death between us," exclaimed a firm, decided, and manly voice the instant that darkness fell upon the scene.

With a savage growl the Magsman stooped to pick up his pistol: but it was snatched away from him at the very moment that his hand touched it—Mrs. Brace's unknown lover having, simultaneously sought for the weapon. A terrible imprecation burst from the lips of Joe Warren, as through the intense darkness he aimed a blow with his bludgeon which would have told with murderous effect had it reached him—for whom it was intended. But the unknown had already stepped aside—the next instant the Magsman was tripped up—and Mrs. Brace, throwing up the window, was on the point of screaming for assistance, when the villain, seeing that his position had suddenly become alarming, exclaimed, "Silence, Fanny! don't raise the neighbourhood, and I'll take myself off at once."

"Begone then!" said the unknown individual, releasing the ruffian from the strong grasp which he had laid upon him the moment that he had tripped him up.

The Magsman rose and beat a hasty retreat without uttering another word: not that he was afraid to struggle with his unknown and unseen foe even unto the very death,—but because he was well aware that if a disturbance were created in the house, it would probably end in his arrest—and he had presence of mind enough to recollect that although he had escaped once out of Newgate, he could not hope to perform the same feat a second time.

"Get you back to bed, Fanny," said the unknown; "while I just slip on some clothing and assure myself that the fellow leaves the house."

"For God's sake, beware of him, my

lord," murmured the milliner; "or he will do your lordship a mischief."

"Fear nothing," was the response: and the nobleman—for such he was—stole from the room.

And now a most extraordinary incident crowned the adventure which we are relating. For the nobleman, gliding hastily down the stairs in the pitchy darkness which prevailed, overtook the Magsman near the bottom; and laying his hand upon the villain's shoulder, he said, in a low but impressive whisper, "One word with you, my friend!"

"Well—what now?" demanded the Magsman, in a voice scarcely even as agreeable as the growl of a tiger roused from its nap by the stick of the menagerie-keeper. "If you mean mischief

"I mean nothing of the kind," was the curt and decisive interruption. "On the contrary, you are just the very sort of man for whom I have been seeking these months past—and I am delighted that accident should have thrown such a desperate fellow as you are in my way."

"Then why did you interfere with me up-stairs?" demanded the Magsman gruffly, and more than half-inclined to immolate—or attempt the immolation of—the unknown with his club.

"Because," replied the nobleman unhesitatingly, "in the first place it was necessary, to protect a female from violence—even though that female be, as I understand from what passed, your own lawful wife: secondly, because it was equally necessary to prevent you from creating a disturbance calculated to alarm the household and expose the fact of my presence in Mrs. Brace's bed-room:—and thirdly, because I can put you in the way of earning a sum of money which shall be ample enough to render you independent for the rest of your days in a foreign land."

"This last reason is one which I understand best of all," said the Magsman. "But are you in earnest?—or do you meditate some plan to entrap me?"

"Fool!" ejaculated the nobleman contemptuously; "do you take me for a Bow Street runner?"

"I don't know what the devil to take you for," rejoined the Magsman.

"Nor do I intend to enlighten you," said the nobleman. "But although you could not see me in the bed-room just now, I had a good view of your precious countenance from behind the

curtain—and if I were an artist I could paint it from memory to-morrow, to the very life.”

“You’re complimentary, at any rate,” observed Warren, laconically. “But about this business you hinted at——”

“We cannot discuss it now: nor must your wife up-stairs—no, nor a living soul, save with my consent, become cognizant of what may pass between you and me on another occasion. You know the road in Hyde Park that runs along the border of Kensington Gardens?”

“I do. What next?” demanded the Magsman.

“Amuse yourself with a stroll up and down that road next Sunday evening, from nine to ten o’clock,” said the nobleman; “mind and be alone. You will then know more.”

“I shall not fail you,” answered Warren: “for this looks like business.”

“It will prove a lucrative one to you, my good friend,” responded the nobleman. “But you must now be off as quickly as possible—and I shall see you as far as the front door.”

The Magsman moved on in obedience to this hint; and fruitlessly did he strain his eyes to penetrate the darkness and catch a glimpse of the unknown’s countenance. The obscurity was impervious; and on groping their way into the shop, the nobleman threw a silk handkerchief over his head so that when the door should be opened, the rays of the moon might not stream upon his features.

This precaution therefore baffled the last chance which the Magsman had of obtaining some idea of the personal appearance of the singular individual who from having been a resolute foe promised to become a generous patron.

“Good night,” said Warren, as he crossed the threshold into Pall Mall: “or rather good morning.”

“Here—take your pistol,” whispered the nobleman, placing the weapon in his hand.

The Magsman muttered a word of thanks—thrust the pistol into his pocket—and took his departure at a rapid pace.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

THE ORPHAN.

WE have already, in a previous chapter of this narrative, glanced at the maze of vile and crowded streets lying in the immediate vicinity of Westminster Abbey: and it was into this morass

of brick and mortar, swarming with human reptiles, that Camilla was led by the woman who had manifested so much apparent interest in her behalf.

During the walk from the vicinage of St. James’s Square, Camilla had ingenuously and frankly confided to the woman enough of her history to show that she was an orphan—that she had a few hundred pounds standing in her own name at the Bank of England—and that she had been compelled even at so late an hour in the night, to flee precipitately from an establishment in which she had been engaged but where she had suddenly encountered treatment of the most dishonourable kind. She did not however mention the name of Mrs. Brace—nor did she explain the manner in which she had escaped from her house: a lingering sentiment of delicacy and forbearance rendered her silent on the former point—and she imagined that she should not be believed were she to enter into details respecting the latter.

The woman expressed the deepest sympathy on Camilla’s behalf—declaring that it was fortunate the young lady had fallen in with her, as she would take the greatest care of her until she had decided what course to adopt—and concluding with a strong eulogy on her husband whom she represented to be “the most kind-hearted of men, although his occupation of a drover had somewhat marred his good looks by exposing him to all weathers and leaving him little leisure to attend to his personal appearance.”

In fact, the woman spoke with an air of so much sincerity that Camilla not only placed implicit confidence in her, but was even angry with herself for having allowed the sinister countenance of her husband to produce a disagreeable impression on her mind or excite a momentary suspicion.

Nevertheless, when the woman led the way into that maze of sombre-looking streets, the sudden plunge as it were from the glorious moonlight into the obscurity of narrow lanes and the positive darkness of vile alleys, produced the effect of a shock upon the young girl; and, catching her companion by the arm, she said in a tremulous tone, “Whither are we going?”

“To my lodgings, which are close by,” was the answer, delivered in so calm and collected a voice and with such a reassuring manner that Camilla felt ashamed of her terror. “Poor

people, my dear young lady, are obliged to dwell in strange-looking neighbourhoods," added the woman.

"Alas! that is too true," murmured the orphan, as she continued her way by her companion's side.

In a few minutes the woman stopped in one of the sombre streets—opened a door with a latch-key—and said, "This is my abode, Miss: it is humble—but you are welcome."

Camilla's heart sank within her at the appearance of the place; and yet the woman's words and manner were kind, honest and reassuring. Overcoming her scruples, therefore, by a desperate effort, and exerting all her power to stifle the suspicions that again sprang up in her bosom, the young lady crossed the threshold—plunging as it were into the most pitchy darkness.

The woman shut the door, and requested Camilla to wait one moment in the passage while she entered an adjacent room to procure a light. The half minute which now elapsed seemed to the maiden a perfect age; and her apprehensions increased to such an extent and with such rapidity that they rose into ideas of horror developing themselves in ghastly numbers. But suddenly a light gleamed forth from the open door of the room—the woman re-appeared, with a candle in her hand—and the look which Camilla threw upon her encountered so much placidity of expression on her pale and interesting features, that again were her fears dissipated in an instant, and again was she bitterly vexed with herself for entertaining suspicions which were most probably injurious in the extreme to the female who was affording her a generous hospitality.

The candle revealed a small narrow passage with dingy walls and a staircase at the extremity; and up this flight the woman led the way, Camilla now following her with renewed confidence. A small but cleanly bed-chamber on the first floor received them; and the woman intimated that it was here the young lady was to sleep. She again apologised for the humility of the accommodation, but again likewise affirmed an assurance of the most cordial welcome. Camilla expressed her thanks for the kindness demonstrated towards her—and the woman, placing the candle upon a little table, withdrew.

Carefully locking the door, the orphan hastened to lay aside her clothing—for she was overwhelmed with fatigue; and soon after she had

laid her head upon the pillow slumber sealed her eyes.

She awoke in the morning just as the clock of the Westminster Abbey was striking nine; and when the sunbeams shone upon her eyes and she found herself safe in that homely room but cleanly bed, she again reproached herself for having thought ill of the couple to whom she was indebted for the hospitality she had enjoyed.

Rising from the humble pallet, Camilla performed her toilette: but, during the operation, tears more than once trickled down her cheeks as she thought of the really comfortable home from which she had been compelled to fly, and of the necessity of finding another.

Another home! Alas—alas! 'tis much more easily said than done: and the orphan felt that it was so—and her heart, as it were, came up into her throat as she reflected that the *only true home* which she had ever enjoyed had been swallowed up in the grave of her parents!

O God! robbery is bad—forgery is vile—rape is atrocious—and murder is abhorrent: but to ill-treat the orphan—to be merciless towards the poor being from whom Death has borne away the fond mother and doting father, never to send them back again,—Oh! this is abhorrent also—and the wretch who has no pity for the orphan, is capable of robbery, and forgery, and rape, and murder!

Scarcely was Camilla's toilette performed, when some one tapped gently at the door. She opened it—and the woman made her appearance with many anxious inquiries as to how the young lady had slept. This apparently kind solicitude on her behalf having been duly acknowledged by Camilla, the woman led the way to a small but neatly furnished parlour down-stairs; where breakfast was ready arranged upon the table.

The woman's husband was there, and his appearance had undergone considerable improvement. For he had shaven the beard of several days' growth which enhanced the sinister expression of his countenance when Camilla first beheld him a few hours back—his hair, then matted, was now combed out and neatly arranged—his soiled shirt had been exchanged for clean linen—and he wore a decent suit of black clothes.

"I hope my missus has made you

comfortable, young lady?" said the man, assuming as gentle a tone as his voice could possibly modulate itself to.

"I have to return you both my sincerest thanks for your kindness," answered Camilla.

"Oh! don't say a word about that, Miss," exclaimed the man. "We only performed a Christian duty; and I'm sure that even a heart of stone would have melted to see such a nice young lady as you are in any sort of trouble and distress. Why, when I returned home about an hour after you and my missus, I found her a-crying as if her eyes had turned into water-spouts——"

"Well, well," interrupted the woman—but not petulantly;—"I must confess that I was affected by all the dear young lady had been telling me as we walked along. For it's such a shocking thing to have lost one's parents at so tender an age—But come, dear Miss," she exclaimed, suddenly interrupting herself—for she saw that Camilla had become painfully affected: "dry your tears—don't take on so, there's a sweet girl—and anything that me or my husband can do to assist you, we will perform cheerfully. Come—sit down—and try a cup of tea: it will do you good, Miss,"

Camilla hastily wiped her eyes, and, yielding to the woman's entreaties, took a seat at the table. Her heart was however too full to allow her to experience the slightest appetite: but she forced herself to eat a mouthful for fear her entertainers should think that she was dainty and disliked the homely fare set before her. When the meal was over, the man rose from his seat, observing that he had some particular business to transact in the City, but that he should be back by dinner-time. "The City!" exclaimed his wife. "Are you going into the City the first thing this morning? Well, that is singular——"

"Singular, my dear—how so?" demanded the man, who spoke in very affectionate terms to his wife.

"Because this young lady has some little business to transact in the City, I think. Didn't you say so, Miss?" inquired the woman, turning towards Camilla.

"I must indeed replenish my purse," responded the orphan, with a profound sigh,—"since I have been compelled to leave my situation. Having lost one home, the sooner I settle myself in another the better."

"Then I suppose, Miss, that you've got relations, or trustees, or lawyers, or something of the sort in the City," said the man; "and you want to call upon them. In that case, I shall be very happy to see you safe to their house," he added, with an apparent frankness which quite made the orphan forget the sinister expression of his countenance.

"Alas! I have no relatives—no friends," she returned, hastily wiping away the tears that started forth upon her long lashes, "But, Oh!—I was wrong to say that I had no friends!" she exclaimed, a sudden reminiscence striking her and bringing a tint of animation to her pale cheeks. "Yes—Mr. Meagles—he will advise me how to act——"

"You'd better write a note to your friend Miss," said the man, exchanging a rapid but significant glance with the woman: "and I will take it to him at once for you. It'll be much better than for you to go running about the streets——"

"Thank you—thank you!" exclaimed Camilla, grateful for the suggestion and the offer which accompanied it.

"But it is not necessary for me to write—indeed, my brain is so bewildered that my very sight is dazzled—and I could not pen a single line. My object will be however accomplished if you will have the goodness to call on Mr. Meagles in Jermyn Street;"—and she mentioned the number of Mrs. Pigglesberry's house. "You can tell him that incidents of a most unpleasant nature have occurred, compelling me to leave the establishment in which I held a situation—and that if he will favour me with an immediate visit, his advice will be most thankfully received."

"Your commission, Miss, shall be executed without a moment's unnecessary delay," responded the man, who immediately quitted the house.

Ten minutes elapsed before it struck Camilla that she had forgotten to communicate her name to the individual who had thus undertaken to convey her message to Meagles; and she almost felt surprised and annoyed that the man himself had not asked the question. She however consoled herself with the reflection that Meagles would be certain to guess who it was that thus sent for him—and if not, the description which the messenger would give of her personal appearance could

not fail to recall her to his recollection.

At the expiration of an hour the man returned, wearing a mournful expression of countenance; and Camilla instantly perceived that something was wrong.

"Mr. Meagles isn't at home, Miss," he said; "and I regret to inform you that he won't return for the next six weeks. He's gone to Scotland, it appears, on very particular business—for the Prince of Wales, I think the woman of the house told me——"

"Yes—most probably," murmured poor Camilla, in a stifling tone: "I know that he is very frequently employed in transacting the business of his Royal Highness."

"Well, cheer up, Miss—don't take on about it," said the man. "You're quite welcome to stay here, you know, till your friend returns: and as for money—I'm sure neither me or my missus will ever ask you for a farthing——"

"The young lady is not without funds," observed the woman, as if giving a piece of information to her husband.

"Oh! well—I'm glad of that for her sake, poor dear!" exclaimed the latter. "But how could I know it unless you told me, my love?" he added, in a tone of bland and gentle remonstrance to his wife.

"My good friends," suddenly exclaimed Camilla, after a few moment's deep thought; "my mind is made up how to act. It is true that I possess a few hundreds of pounds in the bank of England, which sum I had hoped to leave there to accumulate while I subsisted by the earnings of my needle. I am determined not to seek for another situation: but I will hire and furnish a neat lodging in a respectable neighbourhood and endeavour to form a connexion as a dress-maker. For this purpose I propose to repair to the City—inquire for some respectable solicitor or stock-broker——"

"If you want a lawyer, Miss," interrupted the woman, "my husband's attorney is one in whom you can place implicit trust. Ah! we were better off ourselves once, Miss, I can assure you—and then we had our regular professional adviser, who has stuck like a friend to us ever since."

"He has indeed!" ejaculated the man. "There isn't a better fellow in the world than Samuel Simmonds, Esquire—though I say it. And what is

more extraordinary still, I've got an appointment with him this forenoon——"

"I shall be thankful," said Camilla, "if you will allow me to accompany you to Mr. Simmonds' office."

"Well—I have got to call at several places first," remarked the man; "but my missus shall go with you into the City presently—and I'll meet you both in Tokenhouse Yard at twelve o'clock precisely."

With this understanding, to which the orphan thankfully assented, he took his departure.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

THE ORPHAN'S FRIENDS.

PRECISELY as the clock of the Royal Exchange was striking mid-day, Camilla Morton and the woman alighted from a hackney-coach in Lothbury, whence they passed into Tokenhouse Yard, which is a blind alley the houses whereof are chiefly let out as offices and business-premises.

With the little money which Camilla had in her possession when she fled from Mrs. Brace's house on the preceding night, she had purchased a bonnet and scarf; and the excitement of having her mind now actively employed had brought back the colour to her cheeks. Her appearance was therefore lady-like, pleasing, and interesting—and, as the woman kept close behind her, it seemed as if a genteel young person was walking attended by her servant.

Scarcely had they entered Tokenhouse Yard when the woman exclaimed, "How fortunate! Here comes my husband with the lawyer!"

And Camilla, raising her eyes, beheld the man advancing in company with a short, stout, red-faced, but respectable-looking individual, dressed in black, and who was immediately introduced to Miss Morton as Mr. Samuel Simmonds.

"Highly honoured to make your acquaintance, Miss," said the attorney. "What can I do for you in the way of business? But had we not better walk back to my offices?" he demanded, glancing over his shoulder in the direction of the farther extremity of Tokenhouse Yard.

"I don't think it's necessary, sir,"

suggested the man. "This young lady only wants to sell out a few pounds——"

"Indeed! Oh! well—it happens that I am just going over to the Bank to meet my broker, who is to sell out twenty thousand for a certain noble lord—my best client in fact," observed Mr. Samuel Simmonds, assuming a confidential tone and air, as if he would not tell everybody that the nameless peer was his most generous patron. "Well, Miss—and how much do you propose to sell out?—and what's the stock? Be so kind as to tell me all about it, Miss—and your business shall be done in a jiffey—ahem! I mean in a moment."

Camilla, taking the abruptness of the lawyer's manner for the off-handedness of business, drew from the bosom of her dress a Bank receipt; and presenting it to the attorney, she said, "This will give you all the necessary explanations, sir: and I am desirous to sell out a hundred pounds."

"Very well, Miss—a hundred pounds," repeated Mr. Samuel Simmonds. "Just be so kind as to step over to the Bank with me. Oh! you may come too—both of you, if you like," he added, turning with a patronising smile to the man and his wife.

The whole party accordingly crossed over the street to the Bank, and entered that court-yard which communicates with Lothbury.

"Stop here one moment, Miss—stop here with the young lady, my good friends," said Mr. Samuel Simmonds, in his off-hand bustling business-like style. "I must just step in and see whether my broker is there yet: or else," he observed, with a knowing wink, "non-professionals, you perceive, will not be allowed to enter this atmosphere which is redolent of cash. And laughing heartily at some wit which he probably saw in the observation, Mr. Samuel Simmonds walked rapidly away—entering the building by a door at the extremity of the court and carrying the Bank receipt in his hand with an air of as much indifference to its value as if it were a piece of waste paper as utterly worthless, for instance, as the leaf of the *Morning Post* that contains the leading articles.

"Clever fellow, that—very clever fellow!" observed the man, ostensibly addressing himself to his wife, but really for the purpose of impressing

the idea which he enunciated on the mind of Miss Morton.

A feeling of uneasiness shot like a pang through the brain of the young lady when she beheld the lawyer depart in such an unceremonious manner with the document which constituted her title to the few hundred pounds that she had in the funds: but scarcely had she begun to reason within herself against the justice of her suspicion, when Mr. Simmonds reappeared, holding the Bank receipt in his hand with the same air as before as if it were a matter of perfect indifference whether he or his client kept it until it was wanted.

"My broker isn't come yet—and it's just as well that he should not have been here at the moment," said Mr. Samuel Simmonds as he accosted the party. "The fact is, I find there's a new regulation issued since yesterday—and people selling out stock must be identified to the broker at his office first. So I tell you what must be done:—you, my good fellow," he continued, addressing himself to the man, "go with the young lady to my broker's—you know where he lives in Cateaton Street—and having identified her, make him come along with you at once. Tell him I'm waiting here about his lordship's twenty thousand pound affair as well as the young lady's business, Miss," he added turning to Camilla,—“will you have the goodness to step as far as Cateaton Street with our good friend here?—and then the matter can be settled in a moment.

Camilla unhesitatingly complied with this request: and away she went in company with the man whose sinister countenance she had completely forgotten—so grateful did she feel towards him for all the trouble himself and his wife were taking in her behalf.

On emerging from the Bank of England however, Camilla observed that her companion drew his hat, which had large slouching brims, very far over his countenance: and pulled the great shawl-handkerchief which he wore very high up: and as the weather was not particularly cold, the proceeding actually assumed in her eyes the appearance of a wish on the man's part to conceal his features. Again did suspicion shoot like a pang through the brain of the orphan: and the feeling was sympathetically felt like an ice-bolt in her heart. She

cast another and more scrutinizing look upon his countenance: but all she could see of it were the eyes that gleamed with a sinister glare, and the nose peering over the shawl-handkerchief. Thus was he muffled up—and yet it was little more than noon—in the broad daylight—and with a crisp and healthy but by no means chilling atmosphere.

What could it mean? Had she fallen into vile hands?—Should she rush back to the Bank of England where she had left the woman and the lawyer, and demand her receipt, or at least assure herself that it was all safe? Her blood literally curdled in her veins and she appeared to be walking on under the influence of a vertigo as she asked herself these questions. Still she obeyed not the suggestive impulse which her suspicions gave; and although every instant beheld those suspicions growing more poignant and intolerable, she had not the moral courage nor the resolution to turn abruptly and retrace her way to the Bank of England because by so doing she should at once be letting the man see that she mistrusted him, his wife, and his attorney altogether. And then, if her suspicions *did* happen to be wrong, how sorry—how grieved—how distressed should she be to think that she had thus injuriously treated persons at whose hands she had received so much kindness!

While these conflicting thoughts, ideas, and inclinations swayed her mind, she still kept walking on by the side of the man; and at length, unable any longer to endure a state of suspense and uncertainty which became excruciating, she said, "I beg your pardon for putting such a question—but are you confident that Mr. Simmonds is completely trustworthy?"

"Trustworthy!" ejaculated the man, speaking from behind the great shawl-handkerchief: "to be sure he is, Miss—or you don't suppose that I would have recommended him to you? Bless your heart alive, he's honesty itself!"

They were now in Cateaton Street, which is a very narrow thoroughfare; and at this moment a waggon so completely blocked up the way that there was only room for one person to pass at a time. The man allowed Camilla to proceed first; and the young lady went quickly on, in the hope of speedily reaching the stockbroker's office.

The waggon was cleared—and, turn-

ing round she looked for her companion. But he was not to be seen! Her suspicions now became maddening and she hurriedly retraced her way along the street. Still she could see nothing of him. With wild and affrighted looks, the orphan increased her pace, and in a few minutes arrived once more at the Bank of England.

Entering the court opening from Lothbury, a glance convinced her that the woman and the attorney had disappeared likewise. A sickening sensation came over the poor girl—her brain reeled—her eyes grew dim—her limbs give way beneath her. But by a sudden and violent effort, she recalled her scattered ideas; and remembering that the lawyer's offices were represented to be situate in Tokenhouse Yard, she hastened thither with a speed which was now animated by despair. On every door and on the wall inside every passage opening from that blind alley, did she search for the name of Simmonds: but she found it not. At length, when the last house in the place was vainly inspected, the orphan staggered against a door-post and pressed her hand to her forehead in order to steady her brain—for she felt as if she were going mad!

But once more did she arouse herself from the influence of despair in order to woo back hope to her bosom; for, Oh! to lose all that she possessed in the world was a blow which seemed of an atrocity too infernal for a good God to permit to fall upon the head of an orphan,—a blow which would strike her as with blasting, searing, lightning, leaving naught save the blackest misery in her soul!

Holding her hand in momentary consideration to her heated, throbbing brow, she reflected that she might have misunderstood Mr. Simmonds—that his offices were not in Tokenhouse Yard—that he was perhaps still waiting for her, but in some other part of the Bank of England—and that an accident had separated her from the man who was leading her to the broker's place of business. These thoughts, rapidly suggesting themselves, appeared so feasible that she even endeavoured to smile at her own silliness in giving way to such harrowing suspicions: but, alas! the smile was sickly indeed, and the suspicions were relieved of little of their agonizing poignancy.

Hastening back to the Bank of England, Camilla accosted the beadle who

stood at the gate, and inquired whether he happened to be acquainted with an attorney of the name of Simmonds.

"I should rayther think you don't want to ax me such a question young o'man," was the gruff response which the lace-bedizened functionary gave, as he raised his staff slowly and let it fall suddenly with the butt-end on the pavement.

"You surely cannot understand my question," said Camilla, the tears starting into her eyes: "or you would at least answer me with the same civility that I exhibited towards you when putting it," she added, in a tone that trembled with emotions.

"All I know is that I see you and another o'man pass the gate just now in company with that notorious feller Simmonds and a suspicious-looking man—and I kept a precious sharp eye on all four on yer," said the beadle. "So you'd better be off"—'cos we don't want pickpockets and prostitutes lurking about here—But, holloa! what's the matter now?" he ejaculated, perceiving that Camilla suddenly burst into a perfect agony of weeping. "Come—tramp—be off with you!" he cried in a brutal tone and with savage manner. "This is a new dodge, I suppose—and you fancy that whimpering vill make gentlemen pull out their purses and empty 'em into yer hand. Come—be off, I say."

And, seizing the wretched girl by the shoulders as she was leaning against the open door to support herself from falling, the beadle bundled her roughly into the street.

Three or four persons instantly stopped to witness the proceeding; and Camilla, overwhelmed with mingled shame and grief, fruitlessly endeavoured to utter a few words of explanation. The beadle made a sign that she was an impostress—the persons whom the scene had attracted, shook their heads and passed on, wondering how so young a creature could practise so much deception—and the Bank functionary of course obtained the credit of being a very vigilant and experienced officer who could detect a rogue or cheat under any disguise.

And the orphan dragged herself away from the spot, ten thousand times more poignantly wounded by the insult she had received then by the loss of all she possessed in the world: for that Simmonds was a notorious character was at least apparent from the

words which had fallen from the beadle's lips.

For a few minutes the mental anguish which Camilla endured was so excruciating that it absorbed every other consideration; but suddenly recollecting that she was in a public place in the middle of a crowded city, and perceiving that her woe-begone aspect was attracting towards her the notice of every one who passed, she dried her eyes—drew her veil over her countenance—and walked mechanically on, without however heeding which way she was going. In this mood the poor creature made the complete circuit of the Bank; and she only became aware of the fact when suddenly startled by finding herself once more within a few yards of the beadle who had ere now so grossly ill-treated her.

Retaining her veil over her countenance, and summoning all her courage to her aid, she accosted the man who evidently did not recognise her again at the moment.

"Not many minutes have elapsed," she said, in a tone the collected firmness of which surprised even herself, "since you cruelly misjudged the character of a respectable young lady, to whom you likewise offered personal violence."

"Ah! and you're the young lady?" ejaculated the beadle, suddenly becoming alarmed lest he had indeed gone too far—for there was now something in her voice and manner which carried a conviction to the man's heart that she was *not* the loose and abandoned character he had so gratuitously represented her to be.

"Yes—I am the young lady," said Camilla: "and if you yourself are a father or a brother—if you have a sister or a grown up daughter whom you love and respect—you ought to feel both sorry and ashamed that you have this day so grossly and unprovokedly insulted me."

The beadle now grew more frightened and began to stammer forth apologies—declaring that there were so many impostors now-a-days it was impossible to know who was honest and who was not—that the Bank especially was made the scene and the theatre of their pranks—and that he was obliged to be very particular or else he should lose his situation.

"All this is doubtless true enough," said Camilla, "but you ought to exercise greater caution. However, I freely forgive you for the ill-treatment which

I experienced at your hands. And now tell me what you know of those people with whom you saw me ere now?"

"Respecting the young o'man and the man with the shawl-handkerchief, I don't know nothink, Miss," answered the beadle, whose tone and manner had changed from the surly roughness of the bully to the cringing servility of a coward who is afraid of the consequences of his ruffianism: "leastways, I could only judge by their looks that they was rum customers. But that scoundrel Simmonds is always lurking about here——"

"Then he is not an attorney, as he pretends?" said Camilla, her heart sinking within her and all the keen, agonising consciousness of utter misery again coming upon her, as the last lingering gleam of hope was now unmistakably destroyed.

"Well—he was a lawyer once, Miss," answered the beadle: "but he's been struck off the rolls long ago—and ever since he's hung about the Bank and 'Change——"

"Which is the way into the public room where persons sell money out of the funds?" demanded Camilla, in a stifling voice.

"Through that door, Miss," responded the functionary, pointing with his staff in the direction indicated by his words.

Away sped the orphan into the establishment; and addressing herself to one of the numerous clerks whom she saw in the room that she thus entered, she put a few inquiries in a rapid and almost incoherent manner—for she was convulsed with an inward grief to which she dared not give vent, but which it cost her the most painful efforts to control. By the individual whom she thus accosted, Camilla was referred to another clerk; and from the lips of this latter official she learned that certain stock standing in a certain name had been sold out within the last half-hour. The book was shown her—her name, as it appeared in the Bank certificate, had been signed by the female who personated her—and that female could have been none other than the treacherous woman who had treated her with such a show of hospitality and friendship.

For a few moments a palsy of the heart and brain seized upon the wretched girl—and a mortal shivering assailed her. Her limbs gave way beneath her—and she clung to the counter for support.

"A forgery has been committed, then?" said the clerk: and the words, which he repeated for the third time, fell upon her ears and recalled her to her senses.

"A forgery—yes—and I am ruined!" she gasped painfully: then as a sudden idea struck her, she fled precipitately from the room.

But the clerk hurried after her—and, overtaking the wretched girl as she was speeding through the courtyard, he said, "I beg your pardon, Miss—but so serious an affair must be looked into immediately."

"I am going somewhere for that purpose," replied the orphan, in a rapid and excited tone.

"You will return, then—you will assist the officers of justice, if necessary, in adopting the proper proceedings——"

"Yes—yes—I will return," exclaimed Camilla; the dread of seeing a lost hope destroyed now rendering her even angrily impatient and petulant.

And, breaking abruptly away from the clerk, she sped forth from the Bank of England.

A hackney-coach was passing at the time: she stopped it—entered the vehicle—and ordered the driver to take her to Westminster and set her down in the immediate vicinity of the Abbey.

The ride, instead of serving as an interval for her to regain her composure, only tended to increase the excitement under which she laboured. For her impatience became agonizing: she longed to repair to the house where she had slept, in the hope of encountering the woman, and either by threats or entreaties inducing her to surrender a part, if not the whole, of the amount which she had received at the Bank. But the coach was drawn by two miserable hacks which crept along at a snail's pace: and, to add to her vexation, Cheapside was thronged with vehicles. Thus was her progress impeded—and all the while her own ideas travelled with the speed of lightning. For she fancied that the man and woman who, under the guise of friendship, had so scandalously plundered her, would have time to return to their abode, pack up their things, and decamp ere she could possibly reach the place. Her impatience therefore grew maddening: and on reaching the Abbey she was in such a state of exhaustion, through the intense workings of her feelings, that she could not immediately alight from the vehicle.

Three times did the coachman inform her, as he stood holding the door wide open, that she had reached her destination,—three times before she could rightly understand him. Then—suddenly reanimated with courage, strength, and energy—she sprang forth and was darting away, when the driver demanded his fare. Her reply was that she should return in a few moments; but her wild and excited manner rendered him suspicious—and he insisted upon being paid at once. Though burning with anxiety to rush onward, Camilla was compelled to yield; and the liquidation of the coachman's claim exhausted the contents of her purse. She was now penniless!

But not pausing to reflect upon this circumstance, nor even heeding the driver's question whether he was to wait for her, the almost maddened girl plunged into that maze of streets in which she knew the house where she had slept was situated. To find this dwelling was not however so easy a task as she had at first anticipated. For the streets in low, obscure and vile neighbourhoods are so much alike—and squalor, vice and misery assimilate all things which come within their fatal scope. Thus, having chased frantically up and down in that labyrinth of poor habitations, Camilla was compelled to relax her pace; and it was when, completely exhausted, she was dragging herself painfully along, scrutinizing every door and every house-front, that she lighted on the abode which she sought.

A gleam of joy flashed though the black and cheerless void into which the wretchedness of a few hours had changed her heart; and she knocked hastily at the door.

The summons was obeyed by a hideous-looking man on whose bald head an excrescence or wen protruded with a disgusting effect; and on every lineament of whose countenance crime was stamped indelibly.

"Are the people of the house at home?" inquired Camilla timidly—for her heart again sank completely within her at the appearance of so repulsive an individual.

"Who dy'e mean?" demanded the fellow, with a tone and manner that were not only brutal but even menacing.

"I mean the man and his wife who gave me a lodging here last night," responded the young girl: "I do not know their names—"

"Lord bless ye!" ejaculated the repulsive individual: "you'll never hear of them no more. They're gone for good, young Miss, I can tell you."

And with these words, which sounded the knell of the orphan's last hope, the fellow banged the door violently in her face.

She turned away—that poor friendless girl—as if she had just heard her death-sentence pronounced. Her countenance was so ghastly pale it seemed as if the blood could almost be perceived in the blue veins: her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth—her throat was as dry as if she had swallowed ashes. Great God! what was to become of her?—whither was she to go?—where seek an asylum? Not at Mrs. Brace's fashionable establishment which the vices of the aristocratic and the profligacy of the great and titled had converted into a luxurious brothel discreetly conducted,—oh! no—not for worlds would she return thither! Death—death—aye, even death by starvation—death in the open street, on the cold pavement,—yes—such a death were preferable to the loss of her honour!

Alas! alas: poor orphan girl, deeply—deeply do we sympathise with thee—boundless is our compassion, O persecuted virgin!

But whither does she now fly so quickly?—what new idea has seized upon her imagination?—what sudden impulse is obeying thus precipitately? she remembers that there is such a person in the world as Meagles—she is hastening to Jermyn street to ascertain whether it be really true that he has undertaken a journey to Scotland. For this purpose is she speeding on so frantically again—'tis her only hope—hope—and her ardent longing to find it realized, lends wings to her feet.

But a sudden vertigo seizes upon her—she stops short—her brain reels—she staggers forwards a few paces, extending her arms as if to implore assistance—then sinks upon a door-step in that vile neighbourhood near the Abbey.

A moan of indescribable anguish escapes her lips—and her senses abandon her!

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

MRS. FITZHERBERT AND TIM

MEAGLES.

IN the splendidly-furnished drawing room belonging to her own suite of apartments at Carlton House, Mrs. Fitzherbert was seated alone, in a pensive mood, upon a sofa placed near the fire which burnt in the grate as if with a cheerfulness that mocked her mournful aspect.

Not only was she indignant and offended on account of the scene which had occurred on the night of the ball: but there was likewise a presentiment of approaching evil weighing heavily upon her heart. For though this was by no means the only quarrel which she had ever experienced with the Prince of Wales, it was nevertheless the first that had lasted so long and that had led to no attempt at reconciliation on his part.

What could this perseverance in maintaining a state of enmity mean?—what did it signify? Had her charms lost their spells—her witcheries their power—her manners their fascination? Or was his Royal Highness in reality so deeply attached to Lady Desborough that he not only pined on account of the disappointment he had experienced, but likewise cherished an unforgiving rancour against her who had thus interposed between himself and the intended victim of his lust?

The untoward incident had taken place on Monday night: it was now Thursday afternoon—and the Prince had not even sent to inquire concerning her health. Two mortal days had thus passed—a third was drawing to its close—and not a word nor a line from him who before God was her husband, through the detestable laws made by man forbade the connexion. At first the lady's indignation and resentment sustained on her own side a feeling which would have made her decline any answer to a verbal message and send back a written one unopened: then, as her more angry sentiments gave way to the fondness which she really experienced for the Prince, her pride prompted her to shroud herself in a reserve as gloomy as that in which he had shut himself up:—and thus from neither side had emanated the least overture towards a reconciliation. Though living beneath the same roof, this husband and wife

had not seen each other for three whole days!

Now therefore the lady's pride was more than ever wounded; and indignation was again asserting its empire in her breast. How haughty was now that curl on her exquisitely chiselled lip!—how menacing was the light which shone in her large blue eyes!—how nervously did her taper fingers play with the long, pale, glossy tresses flowed down upon her plump shoulders of dazzling whiteness and the bosom of such luxurious proportions!

Should she await the royal pleasure of her husband to make up their serious differences?—or should she pen a line conveying the first overture to him?

These were the questions which she asked herself in a moment of milder mood; and she was deliberating the points within her own breast, when a servant threw upon the door of the apartment, announcing Mr. Meagles.

A glow of triumph and the animation of joy lighted up the splendid features of Mrs. Fitzherbert, as she rose to receive the guest: for instantly struck her that he was come as a messenger of peace from his Royal Highness.

Meagles, who was attired in a suit of black, but whose coat nevertheless had a certain sporting cut about it, endeavoured to assume a demureness of countenance which he deemed suitable to the task which he had taken in hand: and indeed, he did feel dissatisfied and low-spirited concerning it—for, much as he really disliked Mrs. Fitzherbert, he could not resist the painful reflection, now when matters were coming to a point, that it was a woman against whom he was about to wage war. Even at the last moment would he have gladly retreated from any farther interference in the business: but interest—self-interest—egotism—these prevailed with a man who was far from being deficient in qualities naturally generous and traits unquestionably amiable.

With a greater courtesy than she had ever before manifested towards him, did Mrs. Fitzherbert proffer her hand to Mr. Meagles and request him to be seated: then, with the tact of that good breeding which affected to see in him only an ordinary visitor and not a messenger sent on a special errand, she began to converse on the current topics of the day with as much graceful ease and unpretending fluency as if she had naught weighing on her mind.

Meagles was far more embarrassed than he thought he should be. Mrs. Fitzherbert's cordiality of manner disarmed him of the rancour which he had cherished against her; and her extreme beauty touched his heart, enlisting his sympathies in spite of himself. He adored the fair sex—and it struck him as being something criminal to plunge into the deepest woe the superb creature, whose eyes were smiling upon him.

But he thought of the dukedom which he hoped to gain eventually—and once more did egotism triumph!

Averting his head partially, so that the lady's artillery of charms and fascinations should not play with such powerful effect upon his looks, he availed himself of a momentary pause in the discourse to observe: "Madam—your Royal Highness—I know not exactly which to call you—"

"Ah! then at all events you are no stranger to the secret of my marriage with the Prince of Wales!" interrupted Mrs. Fitzherbert, with a smile that displayed the brilliant teeth between the parting coral of the lips.

"His Royal Highness keeps few secrets from me, madam," said Meagles, catching a glimpse of the handsome countenance as it appeared handsomer than ever when the light of so sweet a smile played upon it: then, again averting his eyes, he added, "Yes, madam—I am aware that the marriage ceremony was celebrated between yourself and his Royal Highness—"

"And I presume and hope that the Prince speaks of it with respect?" exclaimed the lady suddenly, alarmed by the peculiarity which was apparent in the tone and manner of Tim Meagles as he made the observation which she thus interrupted.

"Oh! his Royal Highness entertains the utmost respect towards you, madam," responded Meagles, not daring to look at her as he thus spoke; "and whatever may happen, he will ever adopt measures to ensure your happiness and prosperity."

"Whatever may happen!" repeated Mrs. Fitzherbert, with increasing alarm—a terror that she vainly endeavoured to conceal; for it was apparent in the half-excited, half-tremulous tone in which she gave utterance to those words—

"And I am sure, madam," continued Meagles, "that no one can regret more deeply—more profoundly—more bitterly than his Royal Highness, the

necessity which compels him to yield obedience to his august father's will—"

"I begin to understand you, sir," murmured the lady, in a faint voice: then subduing her emotions with a great though painful effort, she said, "Tell me candidly, Mr. Meagles—has the Prince sent you to me on this occasion?"

And she laid her hand gently on his arm as she spoke—as if appealing in a friendly spirit to his honour and his generosity to treat her with frankness and candour.

"It is by the desire of his Royal Highness that I have sought this interview," replied Meagles, who was compelled to look Mrs. Fitzherbert in the face as he thus answered her query: and the anxiety which he saw depicted there, in spite of her strenuous endeavours to veil her feelings, did him harm.

"You are a messenger from his Royal Highness,—and the bearer of evil tidings, Mr. Meagles," said the lady, after a few moments' pause. "But tell me all that the Prince has commanded you to communicate—keep me not in suspense, Mr. Meagles, I implore you—"

"Madam," resumed the individual thus energetically appealed to, "I beseech you to prepare yourself to hear intelligence which will no doubt distress you. But the Prince relies upon that attachment which you experience for him—that love which you bear him—"

"Then assuredly the tidings which you are about to impart, are more serious than I could have possibly anticipated," exclaimed Mrs. Fitzherbert, her courage and presence of mind rapidly oozing away; "for it is evident that the Prince has well instructed you how to gild your prefatory words and administer a little honey to mitigate the after bitterness of a vast amount of gall. Oh! Mr. Meagles, if you have any compassion for me, you will at once and without farther delay tell me what his Royal Highness proposes—wishes—or commands."

"The Prince is forced, madam," replied Meagles, "to give his assent to this alliance which has been planned for him—"

"With Caroline of Brunswick!" ejaculated the lady, a visible trembling passing over her magnificent form: and, while the blood rushed to her

countenance, dyeing her cheeks with a crimson hue that made them appear in strong contrast with the pale colour of her shining hair, she bit her lip convulsively in order to restrain an outburst of those feelings which suddenly began to boil within her.

"Yes—with Caroline of Brunswick, madam," repeated Meagles. "No one is better acquainted than yourself with the peculiar position in which the Prince of Wales is placed. His debts are enormous—and the only way of inducing the House of Commons, servile and grovelling as it is towards the Royal family, to vote the funds to liquidate those liabilities, is by offering the marriage of his Royal Highness as a guarantee for his future steadiness."

"His Royal Highness is married, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Fitzherbert, rising from her seat and drawing herself up so proudly and with an air of such queenly hauteur that Meagles was for a few minutes completely overawed. "Yes," continued the lady, in a tone well suited to the feminine dignity of her manner and the loftiness of her bearing,—*"the Prince of Wales is married—and I am his wife! I know it may be objected that there is in existence a certain law entitled the Royal Marriage Act, which was passed twenty-three years ago, and in contravention of which I have become the wife of his Royal Highness. I am aware, therefore, that the detestable technicalities of law courts may pronounce our alliance illegal—and a statute may be made to triumph even over the ordinances of God. But such monstrous proceeding shall not be allowed to take its course without resistance—aye, a bitter resistance on my part. For my marriage is a tie which cannot be trifled with—unless indeed Parliaments shall at once proclaim themselves an authority superior to God and God's ordinances, and declare that they are justified in repealing all the beneficent provisions of the Christian Church in order to suit the whims and pander to the caprices of Royalty. No, Mr. Meagles—the Prince shall not divorce me thus! I love him enough to die for him—but not sufficiently to permit myself to be made the sport of his pleasure and the victim of his convenience: for death were preferable to such an insult!"*

And having thus spoken, Mrs. Fitzherbert sank down exhausted upon her seat.

"Madam," said Meagles, in a deep

and solemn tone,—*"I have listened to you with the utmost attention—and I perfectly agree with you in all the opinions which you have enunciated. For I admit the infamy, the scandal, and the atrocity of the Royal Marriage Act, which suspends in respect to a single family those laws which apply to the millions forming the rest of the community. But allow me to remind you that the English Monarchy is in reality as despotic and as absolute as that of Russia—with only this exception, that whereas the Russian Sovereign promulgates his will all at once in the shape of an ukase, the English Sovereign establishes his tyranny through the medium of a servile Parliament. Nevertheless, madam, it is as easy for the King of England as for the Emperor of Russia to perpetrate a foul wrong—the way in which it is done is alone different."*

"And what would you have me infer from all this, Mr. Meagles?" demanded Mrs. Fitzherbert, in a cold tone: for her excitement had subsided into a glacial aspect of stern determination.

"I would have you understand, madam, that it is utterly useless for you to oppose the will of the British Sovereign," responded Meagles. "He is resolved that the heir-apparent shall marry the Princess of Brunswick—and this self-same heir-apparent dares not disobey him. Under these circumstances, madam, it will be worse than useless for you to throw any objection in the way: for the King's fiat has gone forth—and the Prince has made up his mind to yield with as good a grace as he can well assume."

"And I am to be sacrificed, Mr. Meagles?" said the lady, in a tone so cold and passionless that it seemed as if a marble statue were speaking—and as a marble statue, too, was she now pale, and motionless, and still, all save those white lips between which her words came slowly and freezingly.

"Madam—you will not, I hope, indulge in harsh terms," exclaimed Meagles: for all the severity of expression which the English language is capable of conveying, will not amend the position of affairs. But if you compel me to unfold the truth in all its naked plainness, I must candidly and frankly inform you that King George III would not only sacrifice one poor weak woman, but would see a hundred thousand beautiful female hearts bursting and breaking ere he would yield a single title of his pur-

pose. This is the solemn fact, madam—and with pain and grief is it that I give you so hopeless an assurance. But remember—as yet the King is unacquainted with the fact, that a marriage ceremony was ever performed between yourself and his son——”

“Our interview need not be prolonged, Mr. Meagles,” said Mrs. Fitzherbert, slowly rising from her seat.

“It cannot be concluded, madam, until something definite be settled,” he answered, not rudely but firmly.

“Am I to understand that you await a reply from my lips, in order to convey it to his Royal Highness?” demanded the lady fixing her eyes keenly upon his countenance.

“Madam, the affair is no longer in the hands of the Prince of Wales,” said Meagles, solemnly and impressively.

“Then, in whose charge is it?” asked Mrs. Fitzherbert.

“In mine!” rejoined Meagles.

“Ah!” ejaculated the lady, a flush reappearing on her cheeks and dying away again as suddenly: “then I am to understand that I behold in you an enemy?”

“God forbid that you should force me into an act of hostility!” exclaimed Meagles.

“Nevertheless, your words prove that, under particular circumstances, you are prepared to act on the offensive,” said Mrs. Fitzherbert, her eyelids, her lips, and her bosom now evincing a nervous trepidation which showed that her glacial sternness of purpose was changing into excitement and agitation once more.

“To put as speedy an end as possible to this most painful interview,” observed Meagles, “permit me to inform you that you must expect to behold his Royal Highness no more—otherwise than as a friend.”

“And if I resist this cruel decision—if I proclaim open hostility to this tyrannous conduct—if I assert my rights——” gasped the unhappy lady, throwing a look of mingled entreaty, apprehension, and suspense on Meagles as he stood before her with half-averted countenance.

“O madam!” he exclaimed, in a tone which showed that his heart was not callous to all the pathos of this singular but touching scene—compel me not to give utterance to menaces—force me not to speak in an unmanly way towards you——”

“Nay—I will not be thus easily crushed—thus readily subdued!” eja-

culated the lady, in a moment recovering her presence of mind and the energy of her character. “I know that you are capable of anything desperate, Mr. Meagles—but I defy your threats!”

“And yet you must suspect, madam,” he said, in a tone full of meaning, “that I am acquainted with a secret concerning yourself—a secret involving your honour, madam——Ah! that tell-tale blush shows that I am not misunderstood——”

“But the Marquis de Bellois would not be villain enough to proclaim in his sober moments what he has doubtless boasted of to you, sir, in his wine-cups,” interrupted Mrs. Fitzherbert, the colour coming and going with rapid alternations upon her countenance, and her whole frame trembling with concentrated rage.

“I require not the Marquis de Bellois’ words to corroborate the tale which it is in my power to tell,” said Tim Meagles, forcing himself thus to give utterance to threats of which he was profoundly ashamed.

“Ah! then you fancy that the honour of a woman can be sullied beyond all redemption by the mere fact of your breathing upon it?” exclaimed Mrs. Fitzherbert, in a tone of the bitterest scorn.

“Madam, you do wrong to provoke me,” answered Meagles. “But the sooner you understand me fully, the better. Know, then, that you *must* yield to circumstances——”

“Begone, sir!—begone!” cried the lady, interrupting Meagles with sovereign imperiousness, and pointing towards the door.

“One word, madam—one word——”

“Not a syllable—unless it be to demand my pardon for an insolence which has already lasted much too long. Begone!” repeated the indignant lady: “or I will order my valets to thrust you ignominiously forth into the street!”

“Then learn the truth, at last madam!” cried Meagles, his face becoming purple: and drawing forth a packet of papers he held it significantly up before her eyes.

One glance—one single glance was sufficient to convince the startled and wretched lady that the damning proofs of her amour with the Marquis de Bellois were in the hands of her enemies—and reeling half round, she sank heavily, like a dead weight upon a sofa.

Still she retained her senses—Oh! re-

tained them most keenly, most acutely: for it appeared as if lightnings had suddenly blasted all her hopes—as if the powers of hell clasped her limbs:—and, a cold perspiration breaking out all over her, she was drenched in her own excruciating agony.

“Madam, pardon me—in the name of God! pardon me, for doing all this,” exclaimed Meagles, terrified by the appearance of the unhappy lady: “but I am the creature of circumstances—”

“No, sir—no—the creature of your own diabolical selfishness!” cried Mrs. Fitzherbert, in a rending tone. “You are persecuting me that you may gain a reward: but sooner or later heaven will punish you for the part you have this day taken against me. Tell me, however—tell me,” she said her manner suddenly becoming subdued and her voice sinking,—“does *he*—the Prince—does he know that you possess those papers—”

“As God is a witness to my words, the secret itself—*your* secret—is unknown and unsuspected by his Royal Highness,” exclaimed Meagles.

“And it will remain so, provided that I obey the conditions which you dictate?” she demanded in a hoarse thick tone: then without waiting for a reply, she added, “Had I been left to contend only with the Prince, whom I still look upon and claim as a husband, I would not have yielded—Oh! no—never, never! Nor should all the power which the King might exercise, when informed of the position wherein I stand with regard to his son, have induced me to disavow my marriage or place a seal on my lips respecting it. To the nation would I have appealed—to the country would I have addressed myself. But since *you*, sir, have declared yourself the Prince’s champion in the perpetration of this tremendous wrong, I am forced to submit: for I know,” she exclaimed, her eyes glaring wildly—even savagely upon him,—“I know that you would not scruple to coerce me by the means which a villain’s treachery has placed in your hands. And now, sir,” she demanded, after a few instants’ pause—“what are your orders?”

“The conditions I propose, madam, are that you leave Carlton House as soon as convenient,” said Meagles, not daring to look her in the face; “and I will guarantee that a handsome provision shall be made for you by his Royal Highness.”

“Not a shilling, sir—not a single skilling!” ejaculated Mrs. Fitzherbert, summoning all the dignity and hauteur of her character to her aid: for unless she were thus sustained in a condition of unnatural calmness, she felt that her heart would burst. “And now, sir,” she said, in a tone which was so cold and with a manner which was so glacial that it froze the blood in Meagles’ veins,—“you may return to your royal master, the Prince of Wales. Tell him that you have done his behest—that you have succeeded in inducing me to say farewell for ever to this abode in which I have passed *some* happy hours—and that I do not seek even a moment’s interview with him ere I cross this threshold, never to return. Go, sir—and in less than an hour Mrs. Fitzherbert will be no longer an inmate of Carlton House.”

Thus speaking, she waved her hand imperiously—and Meagles retired with precipitation from the presence of a woman against whom he had suffered himself to be made the instrument of so diabolical persecution.

Repairing straight to the private apartment in which the Prince of Wales was so anxiously expecting him, Meagles flung himself upon a seat—and, though he uttered not a word, his manner indicated that a very painful scene had taken place, but that it had ended agreeably to the wishes of the heir-apparent.

“I can read success in your countenance, Tim,” said his Royal Highness: “but why are you also so infernally mournful?”

“Because I have this day played a part of which I am ashamed,” was the emphatic response. “And yet there was no help for it—the step was rendered imperiously necessary by a variety of circumstances—”

“To be sure—to be sure!” ejaculated the Prince, interrupting his friend who was falling into a musing humour: “there was no help for it! But what has been done?—will she go?—how have you managed?—does she want to see me?”

“Do you wish to see *her*?” demanded Meagles, almost savagely.

“Not I—no—I would rather not,” returned the Prince, fearful that a last interview had been promised. “You do not mean to say that there is to be any leave-taking—”

“None—none!” cried Meagles, emphatically. “She will depart within

an hour—unless indeed her heart should break——”

“Is it possible that she can be so powerfully affected?” exclaimed the heir-apparent, feeling a momentary sorrow stealing over him; but instantaneously recovering his hardihood, he said, “Well, Tim, you have indeed performed prodigies! Yesterday with my father—to-day with Mrs. Fitzherbert——”

“And now, if you wish to testify your gratitude,” interrupted Meagles, “You will at once cease from talking on the latter subject. I tell you that I am displeased with myself—and I feel cold all over as if with remorse. Let us change the conversation, then. Come—have you naught to communicate to me—no new amour——”

“By the bye,” ejaculated the Prince of Wales, a sudden thought striking him,—“I have indeed something to speak to you about. You remember that money-lending fellow, Foster——”

“Who blew his brains out?” cried Meagles, darting a bitterly reproachful glance at his Royal companion.

“The same,” returned the latter coolly, and not noticing the peculiarity of Meagles’ look at the moment. “Well—did you not know that this same man possessed a daughter—a very beautiful girl——”

“And how came you to know it?” demanded Meagles, turning sharply round towards the Prince.

“Egad! I never knew it at all till last night,” continued his Royal Highness. “Only conceive the romance of the narrative I am about to unfold to your ears. Mrs. Brace—the dear, delectable, accommodating Mrs. Brace—received within her establishment a certain Camilla Morton—a sweet creature, attired in deep mourning for the recent loss of both her parents. As a matter of course I determined to possess the charming Camilla——”

“Well—go on—go on!” exclaimed Meagles, scarcely able to restrain the mingled impatience and indignation which now animated him. “You determined to possess the charming Camilla, you say—and Mrs. Brace doubtless aided you——”

“To be sure: she is devoted to me, returned the Prince. “Accordingly, last night I supped with the excellent milliner—and at the proper time I repaired to the young lady’s chamber——”

“What I without any previous understanding, agreement, or appoint-

ment?” exclaimed Meagles. “Upon my word, you carry your love conquests by storm,” he added concealing with a forced laugh the bitter vexation which he in reality experienced.

“By Jove! there was no conquest in this instance—but a signal defeat,” cried the Prince.

“Ha! ha! let us hear all about it,” said Meagles, his laugh now suddenly becoming hearty indeed.

“The tale is told in five words,” continued his Royal Highness. “Miss Camilla Morton was sitting up, although it was past midnight—and she had not made the least preparation for retiring to rest. The fact is, she was in a pensive mood, and was giving way to mournful reflections. This much I ascertained by peeping through the key-hole of her door; and, unable to restrain my impatience, I burst in upon her reverie. After a short colloquy she appeared to consent to my views and wishes, but it was only a trick on her part to get me out of the room, under the pretence that she could not lay aside her clothing before me. And I was fool enough to believe her——”

“Fool indeed!” ejaculated Tim, with another merry laugh—for he now quite enjoyed the Prince’s narrative. “What happened next?”

“Why—the cunning, daring, adventurous puss tied the sheets, blankets, and drapery together,” continued his Royal Highness: “and she lowered herself from a second-floor window down to the pavement of St. James’s Square.

“Merciful God!” exclaimed Meagles terrified by the bare idea of this appalling feat: “what—without experiencing the slightest injury? Impossible!”

“It is so possible, my dear fellow,” returned the Prince, “that I saw it all with my own eyes. And now for the sequel. Prior to trusting herself to the robe, she had most likely intended to secure about her person any papers of consequence which she possessed—for the contents of her work-box and drawers were all drawn confusedly out in different directions: and in her hurry she doubtless dropped a letter upon the floor. At all events, I picked one up: and behold! it was directed to *Miss Rose Foster*, and addressed to the very house in the Edgeware Road where my money-lending Foster used to dwell. The truth flashed to my mind in a moment Camilla Morton was in

mourning for the recent loss of both her parents—the name must be an assumed one—and she could be none other than the daughter of those Fosters who perished so lamentably! Such was the conviction which burst upon me; and I candidly confess that I was staggered for the instant. Something like a remorse sprang up in my breast——”

“Aye—likely enough,” interrupted Meagles: “for you must confess that it would not have been an agreeable sequence to the tragedy of the parents had you persecuted the orphan daughter to death.”

“Are you in earnest, Tim—speaking so seriously?” cried the heir-apparent, in amazement at this display of softness and emotion on his friend’s part.

“Perhaps I may be,” responded Meagles, drily. “But the young lady got clear off, I suppose?”

“Oh! in perfect safety,” rejoined the Prince. “The letter which thus made known to me who she really is, was only an epistle from some school-acquaintance, written several months ago. And now I will tell you what I want you to do, my dear fellow.”

“What?” demanded Meagles.

“To make inquiries who the girl’s relatives and friends are,” returned his Royal Highness: “and endeavour to trace her out. I am determined that she shall not escape me thus——”

At this moment Germain entered the room.

“What do you want?” demanded the Prince, annoyed at being interrupted in the middle of his observations.

“I am ordered to announce to your Royal Highness that Mrs. Fitzherbert has taken her departure from Carlton House:” and having delivered this message, the valet bowed and withdrew.

“Now, thank God! I am unshackled once more,” exclaimed the Prince, rubbing his hands gleefully.

“But only for a short time,” answered Meagles, rising from his seat. “In a few months you will have to lead the Princess Caroline of Brunswick to the altar.”

“And the idea of that marriage weighs upon my soul like a presentiment of evil,” rejoined the heir-apparent, a deep gloom suddenly spreading itself over his countenance.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

THE BARGAIN OF CRIME.

IT was between nine and ten o’clock on the Sunday evening following the incidents just related—and although dark clouds were piled upon the face of heaven, yet were they so broken that the moon shone brightly forth from amidst them, silvering the edges of their sombre masses.

The Magsman, with his club under his arm, and his hands in his pockets, prowled up and down the road on the western extremity of Hyde Park; and every time he passed a particular clump of trees, he muttered in a low hoarse tone, “No one’s made their appearance yet, old feller.”

“They’ll come, I dare say,” was the responsive growl that came from behind the huge trunks of the leafless trees.

Then no more was said—and the Magsman resumed his walk, which the coldness of the night however accelerated into a short trot.

Presently he beheld some one approaching: and in a few minutes a man of middle height, enveloped in a capacious cloak, and having a black mask over all the upper part of his countenance, accosted the Magsman.

“You are punctual,” said the stranger: and Warren instantly recognised the voice of the individual whom he had encountered at Mrs. Brace’s abode and by whom the present appointment was made.

“I’ve been a-waiting for you this last half-hour,” responded the Magsman; “and therefore I’m more than punctual. But what’s the business about?”

“I presume you are not over particular what you do to earn money?” said the stranger, interrogatively; and the Magsman could distinguish two dark eyes gleaming intently upon him through the holes in the mask.

“As little particular as a man can be in these hard times,” was the response that he gave.

“You have your price for every species of crime which can be suggested to you?” continued the unknown querist.

“There’s nothing you can name that I won’t do,” answered the Magsman,—“provided the reward is a fat one. Now do you comprehend me, sir? For I suppose you want to be assured as to the lengths which I’m prepared to go,

before you open your mind to me," added the ruffian.

"You have accurately divined my intention," responded the stranger: then, sinking his voice to the lowest audible whisper, he said, "And murder has its price as well as aught beside?"

"To be sure," exclaimed the Magsman. "For instance, if I thought you was putting a plant upon me now, I'd shoot you through the head, as unceremoniously as I'd eat my dinner;"—and the moon-beams glanced on the barrel of a pistol which he drew from his pocket.

Put up your weapon, my good fellow," said the nobleman—for such, as the reader will remember, he was—although the Magsman was not aware of the circumstance; "we shall do some business together, instead of quarrelling, ere we part."

"So much the better. But I thought it as well just to let you see that I don't stand the slightest nonsense," observed the Magsman. "And now proceed with any more questions you may wish to put me."

"From what took place between yourself and your wife the other night," resumed the stranger, "it is clear that you incur constant dangers by remaining in this country. Now, if you had your purse well filled, would you not like to try your fortunes on the other side of the Atlantic?"

"In America," ejaculated the Magsman: and he was about to give a decisive negative, accompanied with the remark that there was no place like London for a man of his profession, when suddenly checking himself, he substituted an affirmative answer—observing, "Yes—if it was made worth my while, I shouldn't at all mind visiting them free States which have thrown off the yoke of old George III. But if a murder is to be committed," he continued with a coolness which made the nobleman shudder though he himself had suggested that such a crime was in contemplation,—“it surely isn't necessary to go all the way to America to cut a chap's throat."

"Not at all," was the immediate answer. "But it suits my purpose that when the business which I have in hand shall be completed, those whom I may have engaged to carry it into execution shall be shipped without delay for America. If this proposal meets your views, well and good; if

not, we may go our ways at once and no harm is done."

"Anything suits my book," said the Magsman, "as long as there's blunt forthcoming and plenty of it."

"I think, then, that we shall agree very shortly," observed the unknown. "Have you a faithful friend whom you can trust—a man like yourself—"

"As like me in villany as two peas," interrupted the Magsman: "but I should say he was a trifle uglier in the face."

"And he would consent not only to bear his part in any crime," continued the nobleman,—“but likewise to bid farewell to his native land for ever, and settle in America with the fruits of this service which I require?"

"I can answer for him as easily as for myself," replied Warren.

"Five thousand pounds, then, are the prices which I offer for the deed that is to be done," said the stranger.

"'Tis a grand sum—two thousand five hundred a-piece," observed the Magsman. "But how is it to be paid?—all in a lump?"

"Decidedly not," was the emphatic answer:—"or else what guarantee have I that you will embark for America when once the money is in your pocket? These are the terms I propose:—"Five hundred pounds a-piece, for you and your friend, the moment we reach the place where the deed is to be accomplished. Five hundred pounds more for each, so soon as the deed shall have been accomplished. The remaining fifteen hundred pounds a-piece to be paid when you stand on the deck of the vessel at Liverpool."

"Agreed!" exclaimed the Magsman. "These are terms which don't require much consideration. And now, when is the affair to be carried into execution?"

"To-night, if you can procure the aid of your friend at once," answered the nobleman: "and if not, to-morrow night at latest."

"As for my friend," said Joe Warren,—"I could get him with us in a brace of shakes: but the notice for to-night is so precious short—and we've both got friends to take leave of—besides, I've a young woman I should like to take out with me—and my pal has got a daughter that he'd wish to say good-bye to—"

"You could both write to your friends from Liverpool," interrupted the nobleman; "and the young woman you speak of might follow you in the

very next ship. Therefore if you can possibly make arrangements for to-night I shall be well pleased—inasmuch as my preparations are all in readiness."

"It shall be as you wish," said the Magsman. And in the same way as you made preparation in the belief that the thing would come off to-night, so did I take a similar precaution in the expectation that there was business in hand which might probably give employment to two. Now then, Price—old feller—come along!" he exclaimed, bawling out loud.

"All right!" ejaculated a voice from a short distance; and at the same moment the Big Beggarman emerged from behind an adjacent knot of trees.

"I also am provided with weapons, understand," exclaimed the nobleman, in an impressive tone to Joe Warren: "and I hesitate not to punish treachery."

Thus speaking he thrust forth his arms from beneath his cloak—and each hand grasped a pistol, the click of which as he cocked them fell sharply on the Magsman's ears.

"Lord bless ye, sir," ejaculated the latter; "me and my pal are as harmless as doves towards our patrons. Only, to tell you the truth, I didn't know but what some plant might be meant against me, in which case I had the Big Beggarman—for that's his name—close handy to assist. And it's lucky that I took such a precaution, since you want your business come off to-night and it requires two to do it."

"Very lucky," observed the nobleman laconically, as he concealed his weapons beneath his cloak. "But I leave you to explain matters to your companion."

Thus speaking, he walked a little way aside—keeping a sharp eye, however, through his mask upon the two villains, who were soon in earnest conversation together. Their discourse did not however last long: for at the expiration of a few minutes, the Magsman accosted the nobleman, saying, "I knew it would be all right—and I told you so. My pal is perfectly agreeable, and accepts the conditions which you've proposed. In fact, he's quite ready to cut as many throats from ear to ear as you may want us to try our hands upon."

"Follow me, then!" exclaimed the nobleman, a cold shudder passing over

his form as this terrible language fell upon his ears.

The party proceeded at a rapid pace until they reached the Tyburn Road on the northern boundary of Hyde Park; and beneath the shade of the trees overhanging the wall of Kensington Gardens, a private carriage drawn by two horses was waiting. The lamps of the vehicle were not lighted—the blinds were drawn up—and no servant was in attendance save the postilion, who wore a drab great-coat and a shawl handkerchief coming up to his nose.

This individual opened the door in silence the moment he beheld his master approaching in company with the two men; and the three got into the carriage, one corner of which was already occupied by a female. The nobleman placed himself next to her: the Magsman and the Big Beggarman took their seat opposite, which was the one nearest to the horses;—and the postilion closed the door upon the party. In another moment the vehicle sped rapidly away down the road.

Complete darkness reigned inside, all the blinds being carefully drawn up. A long silence likewise prevailed, but this was presently interrupted by the nobleman offering the two ruffians refreshments, with which, it appeared, the pockets of the carriage were well supplied. Substantial sandwiches and flasks of brandy were presented to them, and in spite of the intense obscurity, neither the Magsman nor the Big Beggarman failed to find the way to their mouths.

The nobleman and the lady—for such she was—now began to converse together in the French language, although they were both English: but their knowledge of the continental tongue enabled them to exchange observations without being understood by their two companions, who continued to eat and drink in silence.

In due time the vehicle stopped to change horses. The blinds were not disturbed—the halt was short—and away sped the carriage again. The Magsman and the Beggarman, having by this time finished their sandwiches and emptied their flasks, snoozed off each into a comfortable nap which lasted until the horses were changed again. Then, the relay being effected, they fell asleep once more; and thus, what with waking up at intervals and relapsing into slumber again, they whiled away several hours—the journey continuing the whole time.

At length the carriage halted altogether, and the lady let down the blind on one side while the nobleman did the same on the other.

The grey dawn of morning rendered all things visible, but with a misty appearance; and the first impulse of the Magsman and the Beggarman was to cast their eyes upon the lady. But their survey of her was by no means comprehensive; for like her male companion, she was wrapt in an ample cloak, and wore a mask concealing all the upper part of her countenance. Her hair was so arranged that but little of it was visible beneath her slouching gipsy bonnet: nevertheless two or three straggling curls had fallen during the night—and these were of a dark glossy brown. The eyes that looked forth from behind the mask, appeared of a deep blue—and the chin which was completely visible, was sweetly rounded and dazzlingly fair. In fine, there was every indication, despite the disguise, that the lady was young—and even the coarse imaginations of the Beggarman and Joe Waren believed her to be beautiful.

From the lady their eyes were cast from the windows of the vehicle; and they found that the halt had taken place in a bye-lane leading through a woody tract of country. At a distance of about a quarter of a mile, a small farm house reared its white walls and its heavy gables, picturesque even in the winter-time:—and on an eminence, apparently a couple of miles farther on in the same direction, a spacious mansion seemed to command a view of the entire district.

These were the only habitations visible: but at a short distance ahead some kind of building was evidently in progress—for the poles of a scaffolding, the triangularly arranged props sustaining a huge stone and unfinished walls of masonry met the eyes of the Magsman and the Beggarman as they leant from the windows, sweeping the whole country round with their keen, searching looks.

But where they were—in what country, or in what part of England—they knew no more than the dead.

The postilion opened the door of the carriage: the nobleman immediately leapt out—assisted the lady to alight—and then bade the Magsman and the Big Beggarman follow.

Giving his arm to the lady, he led the way down the lane, towards the building which was in the course of

being raised, and which proved, on a nearer view, to be a bridge partially erected and intended to span a stream of about thirty yards wide.

CHAPTER XC.

THE CRIME ACCOMPLISHED.

THE reader must now be made to understand that a huge hollow buttress standing at the water's edge, had already been raised to a level with the bank which went sloping down; and in the interior of this buttress it was doubtless intended, as is usual in such cases, to deposit a specimen of each class of current coin together with any other memorials of the actual year which fancy might dictate. The interior of the buttress was large; and over the opening was suspended the massive crowning stone ready to be lowered whenever the attendant ceremony should be fixed to take place.

Having gained the end of the lane, which communicated with a road that ran from the spot where the bridge was being built to the farm-house already alluded to, the lady abruptly quitted the party; and the nobleman said to his two hired ruffians, "We must conceal ourselves here for a short time."

They accordingly all three posted themselves behind a quantity of building-stones piled up in readiness to be used for the bridge; and as the trio were thus placed, no one passing along the road could possibly observe them.

The nobleman now began to give his instructions in a cool, calm, and deliberate manner.

"In the course of half-an-hour or so," he said, "that lady who has just left us, will return down the road, proceeding towards the bridge. She will be accompanied by a young gentleman. They will pass on the other side of this pile of granite-blocks; and you must both rush forth—seize upon the young gentleman—thrust this piece of sponge into his mouth as a gag—and then dispose of him in precisely the manner I shall dictate. You comprehend me?"

"There's no mistake about it, sir," observed the Magsman.

"Plain as the A. B. C.," muttered the Big Beggarman.

"Here, then," resumed the unknown producing a pocket-book and taking

out a portion of its contents,—“here, then, is a five-hundred-pound Bank note for each of you according to agreement.

“That’s what I call business-like,” said the Magsman, his eyes gloating over the flimsy representative of the sum named.

“And straight for’ard,” added the Big Beggarman, securing his own note about his person.

There was now a long silence—and every two or three minutes the nobleman looked anxiously in the direction of the farm-house whither the lady had gone. An increasing nervousness was perceptible in his manner despite the mask that concealed all that portion of the countenance which expresses the feelings and denotes what is passing in the mind; and the chattering of his teeth was even audible every now and then. At length an ejaculation of pleasure escaped his lips; and the Magsman and Big Beggarman, looking in the same direction, beheld the lady retracing her way rapidly down the road, leaning on the arm of a gentleman.

The mists of that morning hour had by this time dispersed—and already did a faint quivering in the east denote that the sunbeams were endeavouring to force their way through the heavy atmosphere. The weather was cold—not with the crisp exhilarating freshness of a frosty air, but with the more piercing, penetrating chill of dampness. But though the nobleman trembled, alike with the natural cold and from the influence of harrowing feelings—yet neither the Magsman nor the Big Beggarman appeared in the least degree uncomfortable.

And now as the lady and the gentleman drew nearer and nearer as they came arm-in-arm along the road, Joe Warren and his accomplice were enabled to observe that the latter was young—apparently about two or three and twenty—tall, slender, handsome, and well-dressed. By his manner, it seemed that he was conversing not only joyously but affectionately with his companion as they walked rapidly on. But from time to time he cast a furtive look, behind him towards the farm-house, as if fearful of pursuit. All was still and quiet, however in that direction.

The lady still wore her mask: but the elegance of her gait and the musical grace of her walk could not be concealed by the ample cloak which

enveloped her:—and the Magsman felt convinced that she belonged to the upper class. As for the Big Beggarman he did not trouble himself much about the matter, his whole thoughts being centred in the reward that he was to gain and of which he had already received a handsome instalment as an earnest.

And now the fatal moment was at hand!

Forth sprang the Magsman and the Big Beggarman from behind the pile of granite blocks:—forth they sprang, we say—like tigers bursting from their lair—and the young gentleman gave vent to a loud cry of mingled amazement and terror as their iron grasp was laid upon him. The masked lady stepped abruptly aside, so as to leave him completely at the mercy of the ruffians; and at that instant the conviction appeared to flash to the mind of the unhappy victim that *she* had betrayed him!

Then, ere the Magsman had time to thrust into his mouth the sponge which the nobleman had given him for the purpose, the young gentleman gave utterance to a moan of bitter anguish, accompanied by the mention of a female Christian name!

And that name was caught by the ears of the Magsman and the Big Beggarman: but the next moment the victim was silenced—for they thrust the gag into his mouth, despite the desperate struggles which he made and the maddened resistance which he offered.

“By heaven! I will shoot him if he dares to utter another word!” exclaimed the nobleman, now springing forth from behind the granite-blocks, with a pistol ready cocked in his hand.

“No—no!” cried the lady, in a stifling voice of profound emotion; “he is silenced now—spill not his blood—”

“Bring him this way, my men!” said the nobleman hastily; and, taking the lady’s hand, he led her in advance towards the bridge.

The young gentleman continued to struggle violently: but the united strength of the Magsman and Big Beggarman was irresistible—and they dragged him on towards the spot which the nobleman and the lady had already reached and whither the former was beckoning them with feverish excitement.

But all this took place in far less time than we are occupying in detailing it: comparatively it was the work of a

minute—one brief minute, in which fear, despair, agony, and the bitterness of death itself were all concentrated and compressed!

And, O horror of horrors! how can we find words to do justice to the crowning tragedy?

For, in obedience to the signs which the nobleman made, the Magsman and the Beggarman thrust the unhappy, writhing, struggling, despairing youth into the hollow of the buttress: yes—there they thrust him—into that hole they forced him down headlong—and then, loosening the winch-rope which sustained the massive stone above, they let it fall upon the mouth of this living tomb!

It was done—that tremendous deed was accomplished—this astounding crime was consummated!

And, stiffened with dread horror, the nobleman and the lady—appalled by the very tragedy of which they themselves had proved the directing arch-fiends—remained, transfixed as it were to the spot, with their eyes riveted on that crowning stone beneath which their victim had disappeared.

But the lady was the first to recover her presence of mind—the first to throw off the coils of remorse.

"Come," she said, suddenly starting from that statue-like immoveability into which terror had temporarily paralyzed her, and laying her hand upon the arm of her companion in order to arouse him likewise from the numbness and torpor of his senses—"come," she repeated—"for we have yet much to do!"

"Would to God that we had never begun this dread work at all!" he murmured in a tone so low that his words escaped the ears of the Magsman and the Big Beggarman.

"Coward!—you are a coward!" said the lady, the reproach hissing savagely between her lips, as her eyes from behind the mask seemed to shoot forth living fire. "But, come—collect your energies—recall your courage," she added immediately and in a more conciliatory tone; "remember all the advantages which will ensue from the deed just perpetrated."

"Oh! yes—advantages beyond number—gold to gild the wounded conscience—broad lands to appease the worm of remorse!" ejaculated the nobleman: "marvellous, truly!" and he laughed the fiendish biting laugh advantages which has the poison of hell in its mirth.

"Merciful God! compose yourself," said the lady, imploringly. "Those men will overhear you—"

"Pardon—forgive me—I knew not what I said nor what I did for the moment," interrupted the nobleman, pressing the lady's hand reassuringly. "Just now, when I proposed to fire upon *him*, it was you who were overcome by your feelings of horror—and now that the deed is done, it is my turn! But come—come away—let us depart—the morning is advancing—the masons will be coming—"

"Come, then—and beware how you give rein to your tongue!" whispered the lady, impressively.

The party now retraced their steps to the carriage: the nobleman and his fair companion resumed their places by each other's side—the Magsman and the Big Beggarman seated themselves opposite—the blinds were pulled up again—and the vehicle rolled rapidly away from the vicinage of the spot where so tremendous a crime had been perpetrated.

And still neither the Magsman nor the Big Beggarman entertained the slightest notion of where they were, nor what part of England had been made the theatre of so foul a tragedy.

For upwards of an hour did the carriage proceed without stopping: and at length it halted. The blinds were put down again—the party alighted—and the Magsman, and Beggarman, on casting their looks around, perceived that the vehicle was standing at the door of a small but neat cottage on the threshold of which an old man and woman were bowing respectfully to the nobleman and the lady. This habitation stood in a lonely spot, by the side of a narrow road which evidently was not a great highway; and the ivy covered tower of a village church peeped above a hill at a distance of about two miles.

The Magsman and the Big Beggarman were forthwith conducted by the old couple, who were dressed like peasants in comfortable circumstances, into a neat room serving alike as kitchen and parlour; and their eyes were not only gladdened by the appearance of a cheerful log-fire blazing on the ample hearth, but also by the preparations that were in progress for a comfortable breakfast. A clock, which stood in a corner of the room, showed them that it was now nine o'clock on this memorable morning.

The nobleman and lady remained

outside in earnest conversation for nearly ten minutes, at the expiration of which period they entered the cottage. By this time the coffee was made by the old woman; and the lady, having hastily partaken of a cup, but without removing her mask, shook hands with the nobleman and returned to the carriage which instantaneously drove away.

The unknown employer of the Magsman and the Big Beggarman now thrust another five hundred pound note into the hands of each, whispering at the same time, "You are to remain here until the evening, when some little additional service—but of a less serious nature than the former," he observed significantly, "will be required at your hands. I may as well state that it will be useless for you to put any questions to these good people," he added, turning his masked countenance for a moment towards the old man and woman;—"inasmuch as they will turn a deaf ear to such inquiries. Moreover, should you even cross the threshold of the door without my permission, all the rest of our bargain becomes annulled in an instant and you forfeit the balance of the reward. Now do we understand each other?"

"Perfectly," answered the Magsman; "and neither me nor my pal will do anything for you to disapprove of."

"Sit down, then," said the nobleman, "and partake of the breakfast which is now served up."

The men to whom this invitation was addressed did not require a second bidding: but placing themselves at the table they commenced a desperate onslaught on the hot coffee, home-made bread, rashers of bacon, and new-laid eggs which were served up with no niggard hand. The nobleman taking off his cloak and appearing in a handsome suit of black, seated himself at a side-table, with his back towards the Magsman and the Big Beggarman, so that he might raise his mask conveniently to enable him to eat his breakfast without standing the chance of disclosing his features to those individuals.

The meal being concluded, the Magsman and Beggarman assented to a proposal which was made to them that they should take a few hours' rest in indemnification for the disturbed night which they had passed inside the carriage: and they were accordingly

conducted to a bed-chamber. There they slept until the old man came to arouse them at two o'clock in the afternoon with the agreeable intimation that dinner was ready: and, on descending to the lower room, they found a smoking joint, flanked with dishes of vegetables and jugs of home-brewed ale, already served upon the table. To this repast they did ample justice—while the nobleman partook of his dinner at the side-table.

But even if this personage had not wished to place himself in such a manner that he could eat unobserved by the Magsman and Beggarman—even, we mean, if he had worn no mask at all—still he would not have taken a seat at the same table with them. No—that insufferable pride which animates the English aristocracy would have made him loathe and abhor the idea of associating so intimately with men belonging to a lower grade, for not even the companionship of crime—the complicity of murder,—no—not even this hideous connexion could have induced him to fraternise with the paid instruments of his dark iniquity.

The meal being concluded, pipes and tobacco were supplied to the Magsman and his companion, who addressed themselves to the enjoyment thereof accordingly: and the nobleman retired up-stairs, most probably to snatch a few hours' rest. At all events he did not re-appear until tea was prepared at about seven o'clock,—Joe Warren and the Beggarman having in the interval smoked countless pipes and emptied numerous jugs of ale.

After tea the two men resumed their pipes: but instead of malt liquor they were now regaled with gin—and by the assistance of the tobacco and the spirits they whiled away the time pleasantly enough until ten o'clock, when an excellent supper was set before them. Of this meal the nobleman refused to partake: but Joe Warren and the Big Beggarman did ample justice to it—for, as they laughingly observed to the people of the house, "eating and drinking never came amiss to them."

At eleven o'clock, the nobleman resumed his cloak, beneath which he concealed a dark lantern lent him by the old man, who likewise produced a shovel, a pick-axe, and a bag containing some smaller implements. Of these things the Magsman and the Big Beggarman took charge; and, guided by

their unknown employer, they sallied forth from the cottage.

The moon shone brightly, illuminating the whole scene around and bringing the ivy-covered tower of the village church into strong relief. And it was towards this church that the nobleman led his two agents of evil across the fields—a journey which was performed in silence and without meeting a single soul.

CHAPTER XCI.

THE CHURCH.

THE party entered the churchyard which was crowded with tombstones that gleamed with spectral-like ghastliness in the cold moon-light; and the Magsman began to wonder whether the employer of himself and the Beggarman intended them to perform a little business in the resurrection way before he parted from them.

But the nobleman passed straight along the narrow path which, intersecting the cemetery, led to the church door; and here he stopped. The bag, of which the Big Beggarman had taken charge, furnished a bunch of keys, one of which speedily turned in the lock. The door was thrust open—and the nobleman entered the church with his companions.

The deep silence of the place struck as solemnly upon the heart as the intense chill of the atmosphere did upon the exterior senses, and it was evident that the nobleman felt a species of superstitious awe steal over him—for his hand trembled as he produced the dark lantern from beneath his cloak. As for the Magsman and the Beggarman—they knew not fear of any kind; and the effect of the profound stillness upon their minds was of the most evenescent description.

Passing along the aisle, the nobleman led the way to a small cloistral-looking nook, separated from the body of the church by a screen of sculptured stone, and evidently set apart for the monuments of those families which possessed hereditary sepulchres there.

Stooping down and throwing the light of the lantern in such a manner upon the pavement that he could read the inscriptions graven there, the nobleman in a few moments pointed out a particular stone, which he bade

the two men raise by the help of certain implements which they would find in the bag. At the same time he charged them to perform their work in such a manner that when replaced, the stone should afford no indication of having been recently raised.

The bag, as the nobleman intimated, was found to contain not only all the requisite tools for accomplishing the task now described—but likewise a box of cement for the purpose of refixing the stone in its setting. To work the Magsman and the Big Beggarman therefore went, their employer holding the dark lantern in such a way that while it effectually assisted them, its beams never once permitted them, to read a single word of the inscription graven on the stone which they were removing.

In half an hour this huge fragment of the dull blue pavement was lifted away from the mouth of the vault which it covered; and a narrow flight of stone steps appeared, leading down into the deep darkness of a sepulchre whence a noisome effluvium exhaled—that peculiar odour which has naught like it, and which at once, even when the source is unknown, carries to the sense a conviction of the vicinage of decomposing mortality.

Having allowed some minutes to elapse for the foul air thus to expend itself, the nobleman bade his two assistants descend into the vault. They obeyed—and he hastened to follow them with the lantern in his hand.

The subterranean was spacious: and round the walls were arranged numerous coffins, in three rows—the lowest standing upon the paved floor, and the other two resting on stout iron supporters projecting from the solid masonry. By these means no coffin actually stood upon another; and between the rows there was space sufficient to enable the plates upon the lids to be examined without moving the coffins themselves.

Despite, however, of the interval allowed for the exhalation of the foul air, the stench which prevailed in the vault was almost intolerable; and the Magsman observed, with a terrible imprecation, that "the sooner they did whatever business there was to do, the better he should like it." With the propriety of this suggestion the Big Beggarman signified his concurrence in a remark that began and ended with oaths more horrible than even the one to which his companion had given

utterance; and the blood of the nobleman actually curdled in his veins as this hideous language struck appallingly upon his ears.

"Silence!" he exclaimed, almost sinking beneath the shuddering effects of the cold tremor that passed over him: "such dreadful language is enough to awaken those who sleep around you."

"Me and my pal ain't afraid of the dead, sir," growled the Magsman, with a chuckle which seemed to strike upon the nobleman's mind as something that did him harm.

"I should think not!" exclaimed the Big Beggarman, with even a coarser and more brutal laugh. "I never did see any ghostesses yet—and if so be the dead does walk at times, this is a very favourable opportunity for one of 'em to get up and enjoy a mouthful of fresh air."

But scarcely were those words uttered, when a tremendous explosion, like the report of a cannon, sounded through the vault, accompanied with an effluvium so horrible—so nauseating—so stifling, as scarcely to leave the nobleman and his two assistants the power to scramble up the stone steps and retreat into the purer air of the aisle of the church.

The lantern, which the masked unknown carried in his hand, threw its gleaming rays upon the disturbed and agitated countenances of the two men, whose souls were now filled with a consternation which they vainly endeavoured to conceal from each other.

"What the devil could that have been, Joe?" demanded the Big Beggarman, throwing a stealthy look around him, as if he almost expected to see some hideous shape emerging from the obscurity that reigned beyond the scope of the lamplight.

"I should say that it was Satan warning us not to trespass in his domains," answered the Magsman, with an effectual attempt at a chuckle: for the fellow was so bewildered by a din to him utterly unaccountable as to be really frightened, although he endeavoured to put a good face upon the matter.

"Banish your fears," says the nobleman, who had remained silent for a few minutes in order most probably that the recent occurrence should have time to produce a certain effect upon the men and induce them to abstain from that horrible language in which they had indulged in the vault

and which sounded like tremendous blasphemy in his ears: but now perceiving that the incident was not calculated to produce any such beneficial effect, he thought it useless to delay any longer an explanation of the phenomenon which had frightened them, "The noise which startled us all three," he accordingly continued, "and which drove us so quickly from the vault, was caused by the sudden explosion of a leaden coffin."

"Well—I'm blowed if ever I should have thought of that!" exclaimed the Big Beggarman.

"It is nevertheless as I tell you," resumed the nobleman; "and you can now understand likewise the cause of the dreadful odour which assailed us at the same moment that the din fell upon our ears."

It was from the effluvium, and not from the explosive din, that he beat so rapid a retreat. But we may now return to the vault."

Thither they accordingly retraced their steps, and when once more in the subterranean, they perceived that one of the coffins on the uppermost row at the farther extremity, had burst completely open, and that a half-decomposed corpse was exposed to view. A shudder passed visibly over the nobleman's frame—for his hand trembled so violently that he nearly dropped the lantern: but, regaining his composure with a great effort, he averted his eyes from the ghastly spectacle, and began to examine the plates on the coffins of the highest tier on the right hand side from the entrance.

While thus engaged, his back was turned towards the Magsman and the Big Beggarman: but every other instant he cast a rapid glance furtively around to assure himself that they were contemplating no treachery of any kind. In a few minutes he discovered the particular coffin-plate which, as it appeared, he sought; and while his eyes lingered upon the inscription, the Magsman, who on his side had been rigidly though unsuspectingly watching all his movements, suddenly plucked off a signet-ring from one of the rotting fingers of the corpse that lay exposed in the broken leaden coffin.

This was the work of an instant: the nobleman saw it not—and, while the Big Beggarman nodded approvingly, Joe Warren secured the ring in his waistcoat pocket. But scarcely was

the feat performed, when the employer of the two ruffians turned round and bade them take a chisel from the bag and remove the plate from the particular coffin to which he pointed. This was soon done—the nobleman holding the lantern in such a manner that, while it assisted the operation, it permitted not the operators themselves to read the inscription on the plate.

"What next?" demanded the Magsman as the nobleman secured about his person the plate upon which he seized the moment it was wrenched away from the coffin-lid.

"Hold the light; and stand a little farther off," was the response.

Joe Warren and the Beggarman accordingly fell back a few paces, the former receiving the lantern from the hands of the nobleman who now producing *another* plate from beneath his cloak, proceeded to fasten it on in the place whence the old one had been removed. This task was easily accomplished by means of four black screws and a screw-driver taken from the bag.

"Now we have done all our business in the vault," said the nobleman; and receiving back the lantern from the Magsman, he led the way from the noisome subterranean which was still pervaded with a stifling foetid odour that made the stomach sick, the heart heave, and the tongue experience a thick, clammy, and nauseating taste.

The Magsman and the Beggarman replaced the stone over the mouth of the vault: the box of cement already alluded to was brought into requisition; and the entire pavement, now uniform once more, was swept lightly with a small brush supplied with the bag—so that there was not the slightest indication nor appearance calculated to excite a suspicion of the sanctuary for the dead having been disturbed. And it may likewise be as well to reiterate the observation that while thus employed in consigning the huge flag back to its setting, the two men were not permitted by the masked unknown to catch a glimpse of the inscription graven upon it.

"Now follow me," he said, when this portion of the task was accomplished; and quitting the cloistral nook, he led the way to the farther end of the church, where one of the keys upon the large bunch already mentioned, soon opened a door near the communion-table.

The party now entered the vestry,

which was a small room, carpetted, and surrounded by bench-seats. A surplice and black gown hung against the wall; and in an half-open cupboard an empty decanter and two or three wine glasses appeared upon a shelf. Over the mantel-piece there was a diminutive mirror, to the nail sustaining which a pair of clerical bands was hanging. From one side of the vestry-room a sort of closet opened; and in this recess was kept the iron safe containing the parish registers.

Giving the lantern to the Magsman, the nobleman tried the small keys of his bunch, one after the other, without any effect. The door of the iron safe remained immovable—the lock afforded no symptoms of yielding.

"If it do not give way by fair means, it shall by foul!" exclaimed the unknown, the lower portion of his countenance which the mask left revealed, flushing with the excitement of impatience and vexation.

"Me and my pal would soon make light work of it," observed the Magsman. "There's plenty of implements in the bag that would force the obstinate safe."

"In fact," added the Big Beggarman thinking it necessary to thrust in a word, "there's no safety at all in a safe when me and Joe Warren are concerned."

"You shall try your hands upon it if I cannot manage it without violence," said the nobleman. "But see—this key appears to fit it—yes—it yields—it yields!" he exclaimed, with an inexpressible outburst of joy which led his two assistants to believe that this was not the least important incident in the night's adventures. "Now that your services are not required for the moment," continued the unknown, as he drew forth one of the registers from the safe,—“you can seat yourselves and dispose of a flask of brandy while I inspect this book.

Thus speaking, he produced a case-bottle from beneath his cloak; and while the two ruffians sate down upon one of the benches in the vestry to enjoy it, the nobleman placed himself at the table for the purpose of examining the register.

With the lantern near him in such a manner that its light fell upon the pages as he turned them slowly over after a careful inspection of each, the unknown bent over the huge parochial volume with an attitude that

denoted an absorbing interest; and though all the upper portion of his countenance was concealed by the black mask, yet there was an expression about the mouth which indicated a profound anxiety lest, the record that he sought should not be there.

Leaf after leaf did he turn over—a quarter of an hour passed—the men emptied the brandy-flask—and then they conversed in low whispers. The nobleman seemed to have forgotten their presence, so profoundly absorbed was he in the register: and thus while he was delightfully searching for some entry, the ensuing dialogue, took place between them.

"This is the rummest lark altogether that I ever knew in all my life," observed the Magsman.

It's a reglar romance," returned the Big Beggarman. "But have you any idea whereabouts in England we are?"

"Not the remotest," was the response. "To do the gentleman justice, he has managed matters so well that he has even, baffled us in that respect. But the day may come, my fine feller," added the Magsman significantly, "when we shall find out everything that is now strange and mysterious. At present we've two distinct clues——"

"Two!" repeated the Big Beggarman: "how d'ye make that out? I only know of the signet-ring which you took off the finger of the mouldy stiff'un down in the vault——"

"And the Christian name of that lady," added the Magsman. "Didn't you catch it?"

"To be sure I did!" was the reply. "What a fool I am to overlook such an important point. Besides, such a peculiar Christian name too——"

"Ah! it was a nice-looking young feller, that screamed out that name," observed the Magsman. "It was almost a pity to put him into the hole. I wonder who the deuce he could have been——"

"And while you're wondering, you may just as well wonder about who the lady was also—and who our friend *there* is," continued the Big Beggarman, nodding his head towards the nobleman who was still poring over the register. But I say, Joe," added the ruffian, sinking his voice to a whisper that was scarcely audible, "what's to prevent us from knocking him on the head and helping ourselves to the contents of his pocket-book, instead

of waiting till he pays us the balance at Liverpool?"

"Lord bless ye," my dear Stephen," returned the Magsman, in the same subdued tone, "do you suppose that I haven't been thinking of the same thing ever since I saw him take out his pocket-book for the first time, this morning when we were standing behind the pile of granite blocks? To be sure I have—and when we were smoking our pipes after dinner in the cottage, I was half a mind to propose to you to cut *his* throat and the old man's and woman's throats also, and so make light work of the business at once. But I thought better of it—and I tell you now that it's more to our interests to let things take their course?"

"How so?" demanded the Beggarman. "Suppose the pocket-book contained more than he has still got to pay us?" then we should be the gainers."

"And suppose it contains less?" returned the Magsman, with a knowing look: "in this case we should be the losers. And it may be probable that the gentleman intends to get more money at Liverpool—or that he has left his pocket-book behind him at the cottage——"

"Well, there's certainly them chances against us," said the Beggarman, in a musing tone, although still speaking in a low whisper.

"But that's not the calculation I've been making," continued the Magsman. "Of course we don't mean to go to America: *that* you and me have already decided upon between ourselves. Well, now—suppose we some day find out who he is—and who the lady is—and what all this business means?—why, let his fortune be whatever it will, at least half of it must find its way into our pockets. He couldn't refuse it—nor the lady either, whoever she is. They're completely in our power; and as they're no doubt well off already, and most likely mean to be much richer still—for this affair hasn't been undertaken for nothing, mark ye—it will be a splendid thing for us to find out who they are and have a hold upon them."

"You're right Joe," observed the Big Beggarman, convinced by this reasoning: "we musn't knock him on the head. He'll be more use to us living—I see that now."

"To be sure," rejoined the Mags-

man; and, the question being thus disposed of, the matter dropped.

But while the ruffians had been thus coolly and calmly deliberating upon the propriety or impropriety of assassinating their marked employer,—he on his part had succeeded in discovering the particular record which he sought in the parochial volume. A smile played upon his lip—and he rubbed his hands together joyfully. Then, taking a pen-knife from his pocket, he carefully scratched out certain words in that entry which regarded his interests or his views; and with equal caution he rubbed over it a very fine powder, or species of pounce, which he had brought for the purpose. The effect was that when he wrote *other words* in the place of those which he had erased, the ink did not run with an improper thickness upon the paper, nor afford any sign or indication that such substitution had taken place. In fact, the forgery was complete and faultless in its execution: the handwriting of the original entry was imitated to a nicety;—and when the ink was entirely dry, the nobleman rubbed the paper gently with the tip of his forefinger on which he collected a little dust by passing along the mantelpiece. The result was to take away from the leaf that whiteness which appeared where the pen-knife had scratched it; and the page thus wore an uniform aspect, as if it had never been tampered with.

The register was now returned to its place—the safe was locked again—and the nobleman quitted the vestry, followed by his two agents. Along the aisle they proceeded, their footsteps raising echoes which made it seem as if there were other midnight visitors in the church; but this they knew to be a delusion—and in safety they emerged from the temple which their presence had so desecrated.

The nobleman was careful to lock the door behind him: and the trio retraced their way through the cemetery—across the fields—back to the cottage, at the door of which they found the travelling-carriage in readiness.

The reader will remember that the masked lady had taken her departure in the vehicle immediately after breakfast in the morning: and it had now returned to convey the nobleman and his two hired bravos to Liverpool.

The old couple were sitting up at the cottage, into which the Magsman and

the Beggarwan were invited to enter and partake of some hasty refreshment. The clock in the room showed them it was nearly two in the morning and thus their nocturnal expedition had occupied three hours.

While they were regaling themselves with some cold meat and hot spirits-and-water, the nobleman presented them each with a hundred pounds, observing, "This is for the extra work which you have done to-night. The balance of the large sum due to both of you shall be paid, according to agreement, when you stand upon the deck of the American packet at Liverpool."

The men, expressed their satisfaction;—and, the meal being concluded, they entered the carriage, followed by the nobleman.

The blinds were drawn up—total darkness reigned within—and the vehicle rolled rapidly, away,—thus perpetuating that deep mystery which had all along been maintained towards the Magsman and the Big Beggarman respecting the whereabouts of those scenes through which they had passed, and the locality of those incidents in which they had borne so large a share.

CHAPTER XCII.

THE WAY-SIDE COTTAGE.—

THE ACCIDENT.

THE journey was continued in profound silence: for the nobleman did not choose to converse with his hireling assassins—and the two men themselves, overcome with weariness, soon fell into a profound slumber. Even when the carriage stopped to change horses, they did not wake up: but at length they were aroused by some one shaking them violently—and then they found that several hours must have passed away. For the blinds were down—the misty grey light of the dawn was throwing a sort of half relief upon the tall buildings of a town at a short distance—and the vehicle was standing at the door of a small cottage, not half so comfortable-looking as the one which had previously afforded the men such good cheer.

The nobleman it was who had aroused his followers; and they all alighted at this dwelling, the only inhabitant of which appeared to be a very aged but

bustling, active woman, remarkably clean though homely in her apparel. She conducted them into her cottage, where the table was already spread for breakfast; and it therefore struck both the Magsman and the Beggarman that their presence was not unexpected. The idea was confirmed, when the nobleman, bidding them follow him upstairs, conducted them to a chamber where he showed them two trunks full of clothing, observing at the same time, "Here is a complete wardrobe for each of you; so that the instant we reach Liverpool you will have nothing to do but to step on board a ship which will sail immediately afterwards. But you will do well to throw aside the apparel you now have on, and dress yourselves in the garments provided for you. In a word, it will be prudent to make yourselves look as decent and respectable as possible."

Having thus spoken, the masked unknown quitted the chamber, closing the door behind him.

"Well, I'm blowed if things ain't done by magic now-a-days," said the Magsman. "In the first place a carriage was ready waiting for us the night before last when we met our employer in Hyde Park: then, when we reached the bridge, yesterday morning, the lady had nothing to do but walk up to the house and lead forth her victim just for all the world as if she carried a wand which he was bound to obey. Next we are whirled away to a cottage where a comfortable old couple have got everything nice and in readiness to entertain us. At night, a bag is furnished with every implement necessary for the visit to the church-vault—even to the very keys that are to open the church-doors themselves. And now we come this morning to another cottage, where breakfast is ready to serve up, and where a couple of trunks full of all kinds of toggery are waiting for us."

"It looks like a fairy tale, Joe," said the Beggarman. "But instead of troubling ourselves about how the trunks and the toggery come here, let us inspect the first and try on the last."

"So we will," observed the Magsman.

The examination of the boxes accordingly commenced; and in each one were found two suits of clothes, shirts, stockings, handkerchiefs, hair-brushes, combs, shaving-tackle, boots—in fine, everything necessary for the

outfit of men who were about to undertake a tolerably long voyage. The clothing was of good but plain materials, and was of that kind which a respectable artizan or operative would purchase.

"Well," ejaculated the Big Beggarman, at last breaking the long silence which had prevailed during the inspection of the various articles: "as sure as my name is Stephen Price, I mean to transmogrify myself in a jiffey. I've taken a sudden fit of cleanliness into my head—and I'll see if I can't make myself look a little respectable."

"You'll never look anything else but a gallows'-bird," said the Magsman, with a coarse laugh.

"Well, Joe," was the retort, "when ever I mount the scaffold, you won't be many paces either before or behind me—and the same funeral service will do for us both. But here is a capital razor; and I mean to have a good shave on the chin at present, whether or not Jack Ketch shall hereafter have the handling of my throat."

The two men proceeded to perform their toilette; and having washed and shaven themselves, they each put on clean linen and a new suit of clothes.

"Somehow or another, I don't feel comfortable when togged off in this fashion," said the Magsman, as he surveyed himself in a little looking-glass that hung to the whitewashed wall of the humble chamber. "You know that even when I've had hundreds of pounds in my pockets, I've never put myself out of the way to look clean or decent; and an old rough coat has always pleased me better than a new one. The fact is, Stephen, respectability don't suit me."

"And I never liked it until now," responded the Big Beggarman. "But I mean to give it a fair trial for a short time."

"I'm afraid you're too ugly, Stephen, to play your new part properly," observed the Magsman, chuckling at the compliment which he thus paid his associate. "But let's go down stairs and see if breakfast's ready: for I'm as hungry as if I hadn't had anything to eat for a month past."

"Come along, then," said the Beggarman;—and they descended accordingly.

In the room below, the masked unknown was already partaking of coffee at a side table; and the old woman hastened to serve up a copious repast

to the two men, who did speedy and ample justice to the fare.

The nobleman glanced towards them to assure himself that they had obeyed his instructions and rendered themselves as decent and respectable-looking as possible: and, being satisfied on that point, he said to the old woman, "Have the goodness to pack up the two trunks without delay, so that they may be in readiness by the time the carriage returns with the fresh horses."

"Yes, my lord," responded the old crone, dropping a curtesy.

"Perdition!" ejaculated the nobleman, instantaneously perceiving that the quick ears of the Magsman and Beggarman had caught those tell-tale words which betrayed his rank: and starting from his seat, he walked once or twice, hastily and evidently in great irritation, up and down the room.

"I beg pardon—sir—my——" stammered the old woman, comprehending the fatal error which she had committed by allowing her tongue to give such glib and ready utterance to the sounding distinction of my lord."

"Begone—and do as I have commanded you," said the unknown, pointing imperiously towards the staircase, up which the old woman hurried with an agility that was truly marvellous for one of such advanced age as she evidently was.

The Magsman and Beggarman proceeded with their breakfast as if nothing extraordinary had happened, and forebore from any remark on the little incident which had just revealed to them the fact that their employer was of aristocratic rank; for it will be remembered that although the readers have all along been aware that the masked unknown was a nobleman, his dialogue with Mrs. Brace on the night of the Magsman's intrusion having caused that circumstance to transpire—yet that the two ruffians now became acquainted with it for the first time.

But in spite of the seeming air of indifference with which they continued to attack the copious fare set before them, it had been evident to the nobleman at the first glance which he cast towards them as the fatal "My lord" fell from the old woman's lips, that their ears had not failed to catch the words: and he could scarcely control even within moderate bounds the rage which he experienced towards the crone whose inadvertence had thus

betrayed his rank. But he soon began to reflect that although his hireling assassins had learnt that he was a *lord*, they were still in utter ignorance of *his title*; and consoling himself with this fact, he thought it prudent not to condescend to the slightest remark on the occurrence. He even spoke in a civil and conciliatory manner to the old woman when she returned to the room—evidently for the purpose of soothing her feelings for the irritation he had previously shown.

The Magsman and the Beggarman, having finished their breakfast, were desired by the nobleman to fetch down their trunks, which the crone had packed up for them; and on ascending to the chamber for this purpose, Joe Warren observed in a low whisper and with a significant look, "Wasn't I right, my good feller, when I made up my mind not to knock this niblike cove on the head? Now we've discovered that he's lord—and it's probable the lady that was with us all the night before last is of high rank also. Let me tell you, Stephen, that this is as pleasant and promising an affair as we have ever had in hand."

"And we'll make the most of it, Joe," responded the Big Beggarman.—"It ought to prove as good as an annuity for us."

Having thus exchanged their sentiments the two ruffians shouldered their trunks and decended to the ground-floor again. The carriage, which had driven away to change horses during breakfast-time, returned in a few minutes; and the men lashed their luggage on to the roof. They then entered the vehicle—the nobleman followed them—the blinds were drawn up once more—and the journey was continued at a rapid rate.

Between three and four hours passed away, during which the horses had been changed twice,—when the carriage suddenly broke down as it was whirling speedily on. The nobleman instantly put down the blinds—opened the door—and leapt out; and a glance at the fore axle-tree, which had snapped in halves, convinced him that some hours must elapse ere the accident could be repaired.

Having consulted with the position for a few moments, he returned to the carriage door and desired the two men to alight. Then drawing them aside beyond ear-shot of the post-boy, he said, "You perceive that our journey has experienced an interruption; and

we must therefore part company at once. Those buildings which rise above yonder trees, belong to the town of Warrington; and Liverpool is only seventeen or eighteen miles distant from that place. You will proceed thither without delay; and on arriving at Liverpool, inquire for the *Royal George* brig. You will find the captain on board; and upon your telling him that your names are Jones and Thompson, he will instantly assign you to the berths which have been already engaged and paid for on your account."

"All that is easy enough," said the Magsman; "and the arrangements have no doubt been made in capital style. But who's to pay us the other fifteen hundred a-piece which is still due! No offence, my lord—but—"

"Silence!" ejaculated the nobleman, imperiously. "You have surely had sufficient proofs of my generosity to be well aware that I am not likely to deceive or defraud you in any one respect. It never was my intention to accompany you all the way to Liverpool—though it certainly was not my purpose to part from you at such a distance as this. But arrangements had already been made respecting the payment of the remaining amount due to each of you; and so soon as you have taken possession of your berths on board the *Royal George*, the captain, who has been led to believe that you are political offenders voluntarily deporting yourselves in order to escape a severer sentence, will place fifteen hundred pounds in the hands of each."

"And if he should prove to be a rascal and stick to the blunt?" said the Magsman not altogether admiring the arrangement.

"You have nothing to fear, my good fellow," rejoined the nobleman, in a tone of decision. "It is neither consistent with my views nor my interest to afford you any excuse or pretext for remaining in England. The money will therefore be paid to you as faithfully and as honourably as the instalments which you have already received."

"But why can't you settle with us now, my lord?" demanded the Magsman, his tone and aspect assuming a slight degree of menace.

"For two reasons," was the prompt and resolute answer. "Because I choose you to quit England, according to our bargain—and because I have not sufficient funds about my person to liqui-

date one tenth part of the amount now due to you. Look here, my good fellow," he continued in a still more impressive and significant tone, while his eyes, shining through the mask, were fixed earnestly and searchingly on the Magsman's countenance: "you will reap no advantage by being obstinate or attempting to frustrate my will. If you rebel against my authority *now*—why, we must fight it out with our pistols, that's all: and if you kill me, you will not have improved your own position one jot. As for any threats of exposure which you might utter, I laugh at *them* and defy *you*. We will not mince matters: you have learnt, through the inadvertency of a foolish old woman who forgot the injunctions of secrecy which she had received, that I am a nobleman. Well—granted that I am—granted even that you discover what my title is,—who on earth would believe your tale if you were to narrate all that has occurred within the last forty-eight hours? Besides, even were it believed, would you not be criminating yourselves as seriously as me? On the other hand suppose that I were to accuse you of having stopped me on this highway and robbed me of all the bank-notes which you have *now* in your possessions,—in what predicament would you be then? You therefore perceive then, my good fellows, that it is useless for you to show your teeth at me; and you had better make up your minds to continue on the same pleasant and agreeable understanding which has hitherto prevailed."

"I'm sure we don't want to quarrel with your lordship," said the Magsman, who could not shut his eyes to the truth of all the reasoning which had just fallen upon his ears. "But you must see that you have got entirely the advantage of us. You know who we are—and we don't know who you are: you have got money to pay us—and we have no means of obtaining it unless you choose to give it;—and when once on board the ship, we shall be prisoners no doubt and unable to come on shore again even if the captain should refuse to hand us over the balance due to us."

"Once for all I tell you that the money *will* be paid to you—and I can say no more, exclaimed the nobleman, angrily!—"unless indeed it be to remind you of the regularity, the precision, and the forethought which have characterised all the proceedings from

the moment we left London until the present time,—and which ought to serve you as sufficient evidence that the person or persons by whom all these arrangements have been so effectually made, are not likely to fall into any error or mistake relative to so paltry a detail in the grand drama as the ensuring to you the punctual and honourable payment of the balance due. No, my good fellows—money is not such an object to me as to render it necessary that I should cheat you, or suffer you to be cheated. Moreover, I may as well observe that the captain of the *Royal George* will deliver you each a sealed letter, enclosing the sums due; but he is not even acquainted with the nature of the contents of those letters, and has not therefore any inducement to purloin them.”

“Well, I suppose we must take your lordship’s word,” said the Magsman, after exchanging a look with the Beggarman.

“In that case you had better loose no time in continuing your journey,” observed the nobleman. “Warrington is before you—and you can easily carry your trunks on your shoulders into that town. A conveyance to Liverpool may be obtained without difficulty; and in a few hours you will be standing on the deck of the *Royal George*.”

“Come along, then, mate, exclaimed the Magsman.

The two ruffians accordingly took down their trunks from the roof of the travelling carriage—threw them upon their shoulders—bade the nobleman farewell—and jogged leisurely along the road to Warrington.

While thus journeying on, Mr. Joseph Warren and Mr. Stephen Price discussed their plans and laid down the course which circumstances now rendered it necessary for them to pursue: but as the resolutions to which they thus came will transpire in the sequel, we need not record them now. Suffice it, therefore, to say that on gaining Warrington they entered a tavern, where they ordered dinner: and while it was being gotten ready, they wrote letters to the Gallows’ Widow and Carrotty Poll in London. These they conveyed to the post with their own hands, some hanger-on about the inn showing them the way, and, having enjoyed a hearty meal, they took their places outside a coach bound to Liverpool.

The short distance of eighteen miles was accomplished pleasantly enough;

for the two men smoked cigars the whole way, and got down to refresh themselves with glasses of ale every time the vehicle stopped.

It was about five o’clock in the evening when they entered Liverpool; and on inquiring in the proper quarter, they soon ascertained that a brig called the *Royal George* was lying in the Mersey, ready to sail for the United States of North America. A boat conveyed them on board the vessel; and, on being introduced to the captain they announced themselves, the Magsman by the name of Jones and the Big Beggarman by the appellation of Thompson.

“All right,” said the skipper, who was a short, thick set, bullet-headed, red-faced man, attired in a complete suit of rough blue, and with a gold-laced band round his cap. “Come down below, mates—and we’ll have two or three words in private together.”

The Magsman and the Big Beggarman followed the captain down the companion-ladder into a next little cabin lighted by a lamp suspended to the ceiling: for as it was now past sunset and the shades of night were gathering fast around, the stern windows looked dull and lustreless as lead.

“Sit down, my friends—make yourselves at home,” said the captain, as he opened a locker and produced a bottle of spirits, glasses, and cigars. “We shall have a pleasant trip—and my instructions are to treat you as well as the rough accommodations of ship-board will permit. Come—help yourselves: the grog is good—the havannahs excellent.”

“Have you got any letters for us?” demanded the Magsman, scarcely able to curb his impatience: for he naturally considered that the response to this question would prove at once whether the nobleman had acted honourably or had played a treacherous part.

“Yes—one for Mr. Jones—and t’other for Mr. Thompson,” said the captain, producing two sealed packets from the locker whence he had taken the refreshments. Here they are—and I’ll leave you to read them by yourselves for a few minutes while I give some orders on deck.”

Thus speaking, the mariner threw the letters upon the table, and then quitted the cabin, closing behind him the door at the bottom of the companion.

"Well—I suppose it's all right," said the Big Beggarman, opening the packet addressed to Mr. Thompson, while his companion proceeded to inspect the one directed to Mr. Jones.

"Damnation!" thundered the latter, suddenly breaking the short pause which had occurred, during which they had both run their eyes over the contents of the letters. "We weren't prepared for *this*, Price!" he exclaimed in a tone of diabolical ferocity, at the same time dashing his cleanned fist so violently down upon the table that he made the bottle and glasses dance with a jingling sound.

"He's got the better of us so far, Joe," returned the Big Beggarman, in a voice expressive of a more deeply concentrated rage. "But what's to be done?"

At this moment the cheerful chorus of the sailors, accompanying the heaving up of the anchor, came swelling and oscillating upon the ears of the two men: and they knew thereby that the ship was about to sail.

Springing from his seat with the fury of a goaded lion, the Magsman tore open the door and rushed up the companion-ladder; but his head came in contact with something that barred his way—he thrust up his hands in the darkness—and they encountered the hatch which was fast battened down over the aperture communicating with the deck. A growl, terrible and savage as that of a hyæna, burst from his throat: and with all his herculean strength he endeavoured the force up the trap door.

But it resisted his efforts as completely as if he were struggling to move the most solid masonry; and baffled, defeated and furious, he stepped back again into the cabin, where he filled a tumbler to the brim with raw spirit, which he drank at a single draught.

"We are done, old feller—done as nicely as that scoundrel of a nobleman could possibly have wished!" he exclaimed at length when the stifling sensation of the fiery alcohol had somewhat passed out of his throat.

"So I see," observed the Beggarman, who appeared to take the matter more coolly than his companion. "But it will be a very strange and very unusual thing, Joe, if any one gets the better of us for long together."

"True, my dear feller, rejoined the Magsman; "and it isn't by putting ourselves into a passion that we shall mend the present aspect of affairs.

Come—let's drink and smoke, since we're prisoners in this infernal den of a cabin; and to-morrow when our heads are cool and we've slept over it, we shall be better able to discuss what's to be done in the present emergency."

"Agreed!" exclaimed the Big Beggarman, lighting a cigar by the lamp that swung overhead.

And while the two ruffians were regaling themselves in the cabin the anchor was weighed—the sails were unfurled—and the *Royal George* began to plough the deep waters of the Mersey.

CHAPTER XCIII.

ROYALTY'S MORNING AMUSEMENT

IT was about half past ten o'clock in the morning: and the Prince of Wales, wrapped in an elegant dressing-gown, was seated in one of the splendid saloons of Carlton House, feasting his eyes upon the forms of six charming creatures who were dancing in his presence.

Cheerful fires blazed in the two grates which heated the room: the light of broad day fell with a roseate tint through the heavy crimson curtains;—and the atmosphere was warm perfumed.

A beautiful young woman was seated at a piano, the strains of which she rendered appropriate to the complete pantomime of voluptuousness which the dancers were performing: for the melody was poured forth in soft transitions from the grave to the lively—from the energetic to the tender, according to the passions or sentiments portrayed by those witching English bayaderes.

Dressed in the gauzy garb of the ballet,—that attire, which although so scanty as to leave the form half naked, is in itself so nearly transparent as to allow little scope for the exercise of the imagination with respect to those charms which it covers,—the six dancing-girls had evidently been chosen on account of their superior fascinations to minister to the pleasures of the royal voluptuary.

As specimens of female loveliness they were perfect—glorious examples of woman's enchanting beauty—splendid models of all the outward graces and seductive charms of their sex. And as they were grouped together in the

voluptuous dance which they were executing, it was impossible to be otherwise than ravished with the softness, smoothness, and polish of their forms—the gradual and easy transition between all their contours—the harmony of the undulating lines which their busts, their figures, and their limbs presented in every view—the flexibility and grace which distinguished all their motions—and the breezing and floating appearance which they assumed in the performance of that pantomime of the passions.

Now did their eyes, speaking to the very soul of the Prince, produce an effect as if a succession of dreamy and sensuous raptures were stealing slowly and softly upon him; then glances of passion, rapidly and fervently darted, sent a thrill of ecstasy through his heart:—now he experienced joyous moments of melting tenderness as they stretched out their white arms towards him, as if wooing him to their delicious embraces: then as they gently and gradually assumed attitudes in which wantonness was exquisitely blended with the most seductive grace, he felt the blood course like lightning in its crimson channels and his passions were excited almost to a fever and a delirium.

Again—while the music pours forth its delicious melody—the dancers perform steps well calculated to show off their rounded yet elastic limbs, and rest for a few moments at a time in positions that display their symmetrical figures to the best advantage. Then from these attitudes of repose—so full of soft and voluptuous languor—they slowly melt as it were once more into the gentle undulations of a subdued, soft and noiseless dance,—depicting all the phases of love's passions and enjoyment by the sweet motion of the mouth, the eyes, the rounding arms, the arching neck, and the wavy, floating appearance of the figure. Thus, enchanting the mind and ravishing the senses, their graceful but voluptuous performance carried the soul through all the graces of sensuous emotion—through all the transactions of soft excitement—and through all the phases of impassioned rapture.

For these six beauteous votaries of the Terpsichorean art appealed to the sense rather than broke abruptly upon it—insinuated the soft witchery of their own loveliness and the magic tenderness of their performance, rather than excited the passions

all in a moment; and in the same way that a liquid and silver voice steals deliciously upon the ear, while a shrill exclamation would only startle and annoy,—so did the united charms of the dancers and their dance gradually enthrall the feelings of the Prince in the bliss of an elysian dream.

He beheld before him no unfeminine vaulting—no childish spinning and whirling with lightning speed—no uncouth distortion of limb threatening dislocation, and producing an unpleasant effect upon the spectator:—but all was softness of motion—gentleness of undulation—and gracefulness of attitude—as if a melting poesy and a flowing rhythm were applied to gesture in order to express the warmth of sentiment, the sunny glow of passion, and the fervid rapture of ecstatic enjoyment.

By thus avoiding all rapid, thrilling, and exhausting successions of violent action, the six dancers were enabled to throw a profoundly sensual and deliciously seductive power alike into their countenances and their movements; so that now their eyes swam in liquid wantonness as by their attitudes they permitted the licentious looks of the Prince to feast upon their swelling bosoms,—then, ere his gaze was even half-satiated, they resumed the slow and undulating movements which displayed the finished form of their limbs and the rich contours of their fine persons: now they would pause again to exhibit their capacity for grace of attitude,—then, gently awakening into life again, they produced an effect as of harmonious feelings in the mind, apart from the real music which stole in all the soft richness of the piano's melody upon the ear.

Not only was there grace in the performance of the dancers, but likewise intellectuality and refinement. In depicting the feelings and tender delights of love, they put forth all their most seducing power and gave a new charm to every attitude of the body, every movement of the limbs, and every expression of the countenance. Juvenile lightness and freshness were subdued into a soft sensuousness that appealed to the imagination, enabling it not only to feast itself upon the charms which were exposed, but likewise to revel in the beauties that were hidden.

And, oh! the licentious Prince both

feasted and revelled in the spectacle thus provided for his morning's diversion: and when he was actually surfeited which the excess of that bliss which his prurient imagination had conjured up, he bade the music and the dancing cease, in order that the young females might congregate around him and enhance by means of sparkling champagne the excitement to which the general feeling was already worked up.

And now—even at this early hour—commenced a revel in which the heir-apparent to the British throne was the hero, and a bevy of ballet-girls the heroines,—a revel in which *he* laid aside all the little dignity which his mind possessed and *they* forgot all the trifling amount of modesty which a profligate career had left them.

With one of these charming syrens upon each knee, the Prince of Wales gave unbridled license to his tongue: and the conversation which ensued would have disgraced a brothel. The champagne flowed freely; and the more frequent grew the libations, the more unblushingly was the disguise of language torn from the lascivious ideas which circulated as unrestrainedly as the wine. The Prince pressed his lips hot with the breath of lust, to the rich red mouths that were moistened with the generous juice of the grape; and on his fevered brow and burning cheeks those courtezans of the Opera imprinted their harlot kisses.

Presently the musician, obedient to a signal which he gave her, returned to the piano: and while the glorious instrument was made to desecrate itself by pouring forth its rich strains in a libidinous measure, the dancing-girl united their voices in the obscene air to which it belonged.

The orgie was thus at its height—and the Prince of Wales was joining in the ribald song,—when the door was suddenly thrown open, and a page announced—"The King!"

Heavens! what a scene of confusion instantaneously followed—and what a spectacle was this to greet the eyes of a monarch and a father!

The musician sprang with a shriek from the piano—the two girls started with responsive screams from the knees of the Prince—the rest fluttered round the table, not knowing how to act and wishing the floor would open and swallow them up: here champagne-glass was dropped and broken—there a bottle was overturned with a

clattering din—and a fruit-dish being upset in the hurry and bewilderment of the scene, scattered its contents upon the floor.

King George III stood aghast! The consternation of mingled horror and amazement was expressed upon his naturally stolid countenance—his hands were spread out fan-like from his wrists—his eye-balls glared wildly—and his whole attitude was so absurd in its indignation, that, were he not the British Sovereign, he would have been saluted with peals of laughter instead of received with looks of dismay.

The Prince of Wales was for a few moments astounded by this sudden apparition of his august father that he remained transfixed to his seat, staring vacantly upon him: but suddenly recovering some portion of his presence of mind, he started up and waved his hand imperiously to the ballet-girl to withdraw. This tacit but unmistakable command recalled *them* also from their bewilderment and confusion: and, as if seized with a panic terror, they rushed towards the door communicating with an inner room,—their gauze drapery fluttering airily—their supple and exquisitely formed limbs moving glancingly, and the nymphlike lightness of their forms acquiring a soaring appearance, as they fled—or rather flew—like a bevy of affrighted fairies from the presence of some uncouth mortal who had intruded upon their sacred retreat.

The apartment was thus cleared of the courtezans of the Opera—and the Prince of Wales found himself alone with the King: for the page who escorted his Majesty thither, had prudently retired the moment he caught a glimpse of the aspect of affairs.

Covered with shame—half tipsy with the generous juice of Epernay which he had imbibed—and not knowing whether to assume an air of contrition or defiance, the Prince of Wales stood balancing himself by holding on to the back of the chair whence he had risen, and gazing vacantly on the countenance of the King who was looking fully as stupidly at him.

"Dreadful—horrible—dreadful!" at length ejaculated the monarch. "I couldn't have believed it, George—I couldn't have believed it. Knew you were wild—but didn't think you were so bad as this: no—didn't think it for a moment. Wouldn't have believed it if any one had told me so. But I can't

Stop in this room—no, not in this room! It smells of wine and orgies—and drunken dissipation—and all that kind of thing. Come, sir,—lead me elsewhere, that I may speak a few words without having my nose offended—nose offended,” retreated his Majesty, applying his fore finger and thumb to his nasal promontory and holding the tip with an expression of deep disgust.

“Be pleased to walk this way, sire,” said the Prince of Wales, endeavouring with all his might to steady both his legs and his ideas: but feeling that he was scarcely able to keep upon the former and that the latter were whirling in chaotic confusion, he muttered to himself as he threw open the door by which the King had originally entered the room, “It’s no use—I’m as drunk as damnation!”

“Eh!—what? what?” ejaculated his Majesty, turning sharply and suddenly round just as he was crossing the threshold: “what was that you said,—eh?”

“I ventured to obseve, sire,” answered the Prince, endeavouring to look as sober as he could,—“that our little revel deserves some extenuation.”

“Ah!—ah!—yes—I caught the *ation*,” cried the King, looking his son very hard in the face; “but I thought that it formed part of some other word. Well—and what excuse have you—eh?—what excuse—”

Simply, most revered sire,” returned the Prince, assuming all the vacant gravity of semi-intoxication,—“simply that those young ladies had come to sing ‘*God save the King!*’ which we were indeed practising at the moment when your Majesty broke in upon us: and the words of the national anthem—hic—had filled us so full of loyalty, that we were obliged to drink your Majesty’s health in bumpers.”

“Hem! well—it may be so—it may be so,” said the King surveying the Prince suspiciously: “and I hope it is for your sake. But when I think of it, how was it that two of the girls were seated on your knees, sir—seated on your knees—eh?”

“Oh! may it please your Majesty, *that*, was to show me how to beat time accurately replied the Prince of Wales.

“Beat fiddlestick!” exclaimed the King: but not choosing to prolong this portion of the discourse, he hurried from the apartment where the orgie had taken place and accompanied his

scape-grace son to another room in the splendid mansion.

Gazing around him as he took the seat which the Prince officiously placed for his accomodation, the King’s eye was speedily offended by certain pictures and statues which, ornamented the apartment and which, without being absolutely indelicate, might certainly have been more decent.

“Hey-dey!” exclaimed his Majesty: “am I in Carlton House—or in a luxurious brothel? ‘*Pou* my word, George, your taste is very vicious—very vicious indeed. What means that naked woman there in the great picture between the windows—eh, sir? Come—speak!”

“It is Venus rising from the ocean, my dear father,” answered the Prince of Wales; and it is considered a perfect master-piece.”

“Master-piece, indeed!—master fiddlestick!” exclaimed his Majesty. “But there’s another—more indelicate still—”

“Helen and Paris, sire,” said the Prince, explaining the subject of this second picture against which the King levelled his objections. “Really your Majesty must be aware—hic—that there’s nothing indecent or improper in the ancient classics, any more than there is in the Bible. Boys at school read about Jupiter’s amours with Europa, and Semele, and Leda, just the same as both boys and girls read the story of Lot and his daughters in the Old Testament—”

“Silence, sirrah!—silence!” ejaculated the King, his puffy cheeks flushing with anger. “I know that you are a voluptuary—a seducer—a gambler—a spendthrift—and a drunkard: but I hope that you are not an infidel likewise.”

“Upon my word,” said the Prince, his own countenance glowing with a crimson deeper than even that which the wine had painted upon it—“your Majesty is highly complimentary. This is the first time your Majesty has deigned for some years to set foot within my humble dwelling: and if your Majesty has nothing more pleasing to communicate than to call me a parcel of hard names, I hope that your Majesty’s visits will henceforth cease altogether.”

“Eh?—what?—what? *This* to me!” ejaculated the monarch, starting from his seat, and surveying his son with mingled amazement and anger.

"To you—or to any one else who unprovokedly insults me," said the Prince of Wales, with that dogged, sullen firmness which so frequently characterises a state of semi-ebriety.

"I give you two minutes to withdraw your expressions, sirrah," exclaimed the King.

"I wouldn't give two damns to withdraw them at all," observed the Prince, flinging upon his father a look of mingled defiance and contempt.

"You will repent of this when you are sober, sir—you'll repent of it, I tell you," cried the King, profoundly irritated. "Such ingratitude, after all I've done for you——"

"All you've done for me!" echoed his Royal Highness, drawing himself up to his full height and becoming almost completely sobered by the reflections which that reproach forced upon his mind. "Let us examine for an instant all the wonderful obligations under which I lie towards your Majesty. In the first place my debts have been paid several times, it is true: but with what?"

"With what!" exclaimed George III. "Why—with money, to be sure."

"Yes—the people's money," retorted the Prince. "Not yours—you haven't a farthing of your own in the whole world. It is all very well *out-of-doors* to let the world and the newspapers talk of the Sovereign's bounty, and such like nonsense: the throne can only be sustained by humbug of that kind. But *in doors*, between you and me, my dear father," added the Prince, with a tone and manner of bitter satire,—"there cannot be a more miserable mockery than for you to vapour and boast of giving away the coin wrung from the very vitals of an over-taxed, oppressed, and wonderfully enduring nation. So much for the money part of the question. As for the moral——"

"Do you mean to affirm, sirrah," exclaimed his Majesty, foaming with rage, "that I have ever set you a bad example?"

"I cannot say that your Majesty has done *that*," returned the Prince: "but *this* I will proclaim—that my education was as wretchedly narrow, defective, and circumscribed——"

"Enough! enough!" cried the King. "We shall have you announcing yourself as a Republican next, and throwing off all allegiance——"

"By heaven! if every one in the country knew as much of the humbug of monarchy as you and I, my

dear father," exclaimed, the Prince of Wales,—"there would be nothing else but Republicans. But there's no fear of my proclaiming myself a democrat. No—no: I *wish* to reign as a King—I *mean* to reign as a King—and I will show the English people that I look upon them as having been made to become the slaves and ministers of my pleasures. Yes—since they will have kings, by heaven! they shall have a true King in me,—one who will grind them down with taxes—trample upon them—spurn them—treat them as lickspittles and menials——"

"You are my own son, after all!" exclaimed his Majesty, considerably softened by these evidences of a due appreciation of regal duties and royal attributes. "The people must be coerced—never conciliated. Once grant them an inch—and they will soon require an ell. If they ask for reform—give them grape-shot: if they meet to demand a redress of grievances—disperse them at the point of the bayonet. The idea that a Sovereign can reign the hearts of his people, is nonsense. He is their natural oppressor; and they can only be ruled by being made to regard the throne as something powerful, grand, awe-inspiring, and terrible. A madman alone would preach the possibility of making it loveable."

And, gasping with the exertion of having thus made one of the only connected and fluent speeches which he ever delivered in his life, the King resumed the seat whence he had started in a rage a few minutes previously.

"Well," said the Prince of Wales, "I am delighted to think that the little breeze which just now arose between us, has lulled into a calm. The truth is, my dear father, I have the highest respect for you when you don't call me names: because there's something particularly ignominious in applying harsh terms to the heir-apparent to the throne. Moreover, at this present instant I have some claims on your Majesty's favour and consideration—inasmuch as I have consented to give my hand to Caroline of Brunswick, and have already sent Mrs. Fitzherbert about her business——"

"Then it is true that this lady has left you?" interrupted George III, joyfully. "Well—I'm glad of it. Very beautiful, no doubt—but a Catholic, George—a Catholic! Always remember to keep up the idea that this is a Protestant throne—Protestant throne. 'Tis the only safeguard of the House of

Hanover—mind *that*! But what were we talking about? Oh! Mrs. Fitzherbert! Well—you've got rid of her—and I congratulate you. Your mother congratulates you, too: she is well pleased—very well pleased. Pitt told us of it a day or two ago—and that is what induced me to visit you personally this morning. While Mrs. Fitzherbert was beneath your roof, I could not cross the threshold. But now circumstances are altered—much altered. When I came just now—quite *incog.*, mind—I would not allow myself to be introduced with any state or ceremony. '*Conduct me direct,*' I said, '*into the presence of the Prince:*'—and I was thinking what a joyful surprise it would be for you, when that lewd scene burst upon my eyes. Oh! fie, George—I am sorry to have received such evidence—unmistakable evidence—of the vicious courses which you pursue."

"Are we to return, sire, to unpleasant subjects?" demanded his Royal Highness, in a cold tone.

"Eh!—what? Uupleasant subjects!" echoed his Majesty. "No—certainly not—very far from it. Come—there's my hand, George—let the past be forgotten—quite forgotten. I won't even reproach you for all that took place at the Castle the other day, when your friend Beagles or Deagles—"

"Meagles," correctively suggested the Prince.

"Well—Meagles, then—Meagles—Meagles," reiterated his Majesty: "but as I was saying, we won't even touch upon the topic. We will turn over a new leaf—a new leaf—an entirely new leaf. You're going to be married—and you must become steady. And to show you that you really have an indulgent father, in spite of—but no matter—let by-gones be by-gones—I was about to observe, to convince you that I will do all I can to please you when you merit my favour, that in the course of three or four days Mr. Clarendon will receive an intimation—"

"Ah! I am glad that this affair has not been neglected!" exclaimed the Prince.

"Neglected—no!" cried his Majesty. "I passed my word to your friend Mr. Meagles—Meagles—Meagles," reiterated the King, dwelling with a species of childish pleasure upon the name. "Let me see—to-day's Wednesday—Wednesday. Well—next Saturday—but not before, mind—you may cause it to be intimated to Mr. Clarendon that the offer of a peerage and a pension which

he will receive on that same morning is a consideration—"

"I understand you, my dear father—and I thank you," interrupted his Royal Highness, "shall I now order luncheon to be served up?" he asked by way of putting an end to a conversation which was growing especially tedious to him.

"No—I must take my departure," responded the King, rising from his seat. "And now, my dear son," he added, his voice suddenly assuming a solemn tone,—"let me beseech you to be circumspect in your conduct. You are about to enter the matrimonial sphere—and the eyes of the nation are upon you. Lord Malmesbury is about to set off for Germany in order to escort the Princess Caroline to England. The portrait of her Serene Highness will be sent to you in a few days—"

"My dear father, I beg of you to abandon this topic—at least for the present," interrupted the Prince of Wales, with an emphasis that was marked and resolute even to sternness. "Were the Princess Caroline of Brunswick as beautiful as an angel, I could not look upon myself in any other light than as a man sacrificed to the most deplorable exigencies. My debts—the cruel necessity of a Prince of the Blood espousing a foreign Princess, instead of a British subject—and the circumstance that this alliance is a merely conventional one in which the hands and not the hearts are joined,—all these circumstances afflict me cruelly. Indeed, I cannot bear to think of the marriage which has been planned for me—and there are times when I recoil from the idea as if it were a hideous spectre haunting my imagination. I consent to the sacrifice," added his Royal Highness, laconically: "but let us not talk of it."

"Be it as you will, my dear son," observed his Majesty: and, wringing the Prince's hand with some degree of emotion he took his departure without uttering another word.

The Prince of Wales paced the room in an agitated manner for some minutes after his royal father had left him: then, suddenly making a strong effort to throw off the gloomy ideas which had stolen upon him, he rang the bell violently.

Germain, the faithful and discreet French valet, instantly answered the summons.

"Are the ballet-dancers gone?" demanded the Prince.

"They departed immediately after the arrival of his Majesty," was the response.

"I am sorry for that!" muttered the heir-apparent to himself: "their presence would have banished the care which now weighs, I know not why, upon my soul."

"May it please your Royal Highness," said Germain, "a young lady, whom I have shown to the Red Drawing Room, solicits an interview."

"A young lady!" echoed the Prince. "Of course she gave you her name?"

The valet handed his master a card.

"Miss Clarendon!" exclaimed the heir-apparent, glancing at the name which it bore; then, after a moment's hesitation, he said, "Hasten and announce that I will be with her in ten minutes."

CHAPTER XCIV.

THE VICTIM OF THE ROYAL LOVER.

THE Prince of Wales repaired to his own private apartment, where he at once adopted the most approved measures to restore himself to a state of complete sobriety: for it struck him as something criminal—indeed, he reflected that it would be adding a flagrant insult to an irreparable injury, were he to appear half-intoxicated in the presence of that wronged and beauteous creature whose image still retained a certain influence over his heart.

Having drunk a bottle of soda-water, he twisted a wet towel round his head, and then entered the warm bath. Issuing thence considerably refreshed, he summoned Germain, and by the aid of this skilful deservant, soon completed his toilette.

His countenance was slightly flushed—but it seemed rather the animation of mental excitement than the effects of wine; and though his brain still felt somewhat heated, he did not regret this circumstance, inasmuch as it inspired him with a bastard courage to encounter the lovely girl whom he had undone.

Taking a last look at himself in the full-length mirror, and feeling well satisfied with his appearance, the Prince of Wales repaired slowly to the drawing-room to which Octavia had been shown. Yes—slowly did he proceed thither: for, in spite of the

feverish hardihood that animated him, he experienced a certain dread, as if his soul quailed and his heart quaked at the idea of in a few moments finding himself face to face with the confiding young woman whom he had made the victim of so black a treachery.

But at length he reached the door: for a few moments he hesitated to open it. What could he say in justification of his conduct?—what hope could he give her? How were they to meet?—and how were they to part? Would she use menaces; with the view of coercing—or prayers for the purpose of melting his soul? It was impossible to say: conjecture was defied—the imagination was set at naught on all those points—and even while the Prince of Wales thus tarried a quarter of a minute at the door, his suspense became aroused to an almost torturing degree.

With a desperate effort over his apprehensions, he entered the room; and, closing the door carefully behind him, he advanced towards the place where Octavia Clarendon was seated.

Her face was not immediately turned towards him: it was averted—and her head was bent downward. His eyes swept her form, the attitude of which indicated a profound grief; and a sharp pang—the sudden paroxysm of remorse—shot through the heart of the Prince with the lancinating effect of a barbed arrow. He stood still at the distance of a dozen paces from his victim—and he contemplated the exquisite beauty of her figure with looks, not of lust—but of compassion. Slowly she turned her head: her eyes met his—her countenance was revealed to him,—not in the radiant glory of those sunny smiles which were wont to greet him,—but with an expression so full of sorrow—so woe-begone that the adder of remorse inflicted a deeper and sharper stinging upon his soul.

"Dearest Octavia," he said, hastening towards her and throwing himself upon his knees at her feet,—“I know that you mean to upbraid me—I know that I merit your reproaches! But is there no chance of forgiveness—no hope of pardon?” he asked, in a voice that was deep and tremulous, as if moved by the saddest music that ever hymned the dirge of passion in the human soul.

“O God! what reply can I make?” ejaculated Octavia, suddenly wringing her hands in a paroxysm of ineffable anguish. “I came to say so many

things to you—and now that I am here, all my thoughts have fallen into confusion !”

“Sweetest—dearest girl, compose yourself and hear me patiently,” said the Prince, seizing her hands and covering them with kisses as he still knelt at her feet. “I shall not seek to justify myself, Octavia,” he continued: “for I know that I have wronged you—cruelly wronged you ! But I am not the villain you may be inclined to deem me. Dazzled by your beauty—maddened by the contemplation of your image, I was not master of myself: had Satan stood before me and demanded my soul as the price of his services in rendering me the possessor of your charms, I should have yielded an assent. Yes—I, who shall one day be King of England, would have sold myself, Octavia, to the King of Hell for your sake !”

“Great heaven ! talk not thus, George,” exclaimed the affrighted girl, her whole frame quivering and shuddering at the awful emphasis which her seducer gave to his impiety. “It is true, then, that you *did* love me—”

“Love you,—Octavia !” ejaculated the Prince, again pressing to his burning lips those fair hands which were not withdrawn. “Oh ! how can you ask me whether I *did* love you, when I love you *now*—yes, at present—more devotedly, more enthusiastically than ever ! The love that I bear for you, Octavia, is imperishable ? The cruel mandates of an absolute sire and a tyrannical Ministry may compel me to bestow my hand upon another : but my heart will ever be thine ! The mystic fires of passion burn at this moment in my soul with as strong a fervour as when I received the first virgin kiss from your lips ; possession has not deadened that warmth nor mitigated that glow,—and the flame will burn on unquenchably until the end. For now my cheek mantles and my heart throbs as heretofore, when I press your dear hands to my lips ; and your forgiveness for the past and promise of continued love for the future would be the crowning joy of my life—the consummation of all my earthly hope !”

“By everything sacred,” exclaimed Octavia, her countenance becoming even wild in its expression—the result of emotions tensely wrung and of feelings painfully overwrought : “by everything sacred, I adjure you

not to address me any more in the language of love ! O God ! my brain whirls—my temples burn as if through the torture of unspeakable anguish—my heart suffers the crucifixion of despair ! To know that you love me, yet be unable to enjoy your love—to hear you breathe the fondest assurance in my ears, yet feel that it were a crime to give back the glowing pledges,—Oh ! it is maddening—maddening !”

And, snatching—tearing her hands away from the clasp in which his Royal Highness sought to retain them, she covered her face therewith ; and the pearly tears streamed in showers between the taper fingers.

“Octavia—my beloved Octavia,” exclaimed the Prince, pressing her knees in an anguish which was indeed unfeigned : “subdue this terrible grief—strive to recover some degree of tranquillity—yield not thus to the wildness of sorrow—”

“Alas ! alas ! with what hope can I console myself ?” cried the wretched girl, removing her hands from her countenance and bending upon her lover looks which bespoke almost a mental aberration—so terrible was her despair. “If you had told me that you loved me no longer—if you had confessed that my image dwelt no longer in your heart, I should have been less afflicted ! Your neglect—your indifference—your faithlessness would have inspired me with other sentiments—more fierce and wild than poignant. But to know—to see—to feel that you do love me, George—to think how happy we might have been, were you only a humble gentleman, or I a Princess—to reflect, in fine, that no earthly felicity could have compared with our’s had circumstances permitted our hands to join at the altar of God,—Oh ! it is this—it is *this* that maddens me,—it is *this* that falls upon my brain like drops of molten lead—it is *this* that penetrates like red hot iron into my heart’s core ! Yes—the dream of love is gone—the morning of stern and terrible reality has dawned on that deep night of passion which was so delicious in its mystery : the clouds are dispersed,—and the light which truth sheds at length is reflected from a broken heart !”

And again the wretched girl gave way to the violence of a rending, tearing anguish.

The Prince sprang from his knees—threw his arms around her—drew her

towards him—strained her to his breast—and poured into her ears all the language of consolation which the eloquence of a real and unfeigned grief could suggest. For this man—usually so cold-blooded, selfish, and so callous,—this hardened, voluptuary who had scarcely experienced a pang when he allowed his myrmidon to drive Mrs. Fitzherbert from his palatial mansion,—this profligate, whose whole life was one monstrous egotism, felt his soul touched and his heart subdued by the piteous spectacle of that fair young creature's excruciating woe.

Yes—he strained her to his breast: and for a few minutes she abandoned herself so entirely to him that those caresses which he at first lavished upon her through the tenderest compassion, began to acquire the fervour of other and less chastened feelings. But, the instant that this fact burst upon her comprehension, Octavia started from his arms—tore herself from his embrace,—and, while her countenance became scarlet, her bosom palpitated, and his whole manner evinced a profound, angry agitation, she exclaimed "My heart is breaking, George—but let me die cherishing the thought that you have loved me not with a dishonouring passion, although dishonour has been my portion!"

And retreating a few paces from the chair which she had left, Octavia sank upon another seat.

Her bonnet had fallen off in the half-struggle which had taken place when she thus wrested herself from the arms of the Prince; and that splendid flood of auburn hair which might have formed the glory of a princess adored and worshipped as Tasso's Leonora, rolled in heavy and shining masses over her shoulders. The sunbeams penetrating between the rich curtains that shaded the windows, appeared to mingle with those luxuriant tresses, imparting to them so fine a gloss and so golden a magnificence that the head of the fair being seemed radiant as that of an angel! Alas! alas! though the glory still circled the brow, yet was the angel fallen; and though heaven's own blessed light still shone around the head, yet had the heart changed into the dross of earth. The serpent had looked in upon the Eden of her heart—had found its flowers rich in perfume and bright in hue—and had changed that fair paradise into desolation. The tempter had

taught her to contemplate Love as the rose of the soul: she had plucked it from its stem—she had pressed it to her bosom—and the hidden thorn had pierced deep into her heart!

And now, as the Prince gazed upon her—while she arranged that flood of glorious hair which swept over her shoulders—he felt that he could not lose a mistress so transcendently beautiful: nay—he even felt that he loved her more than he had ever yet loved a woman in all his life.

"Octavia—sweet Octavia," he said after a long pause—and, as he spoke, he gradually advanced close up to her—"talk not of a breaking heart, I implore you! There are two persons in this room: and think you that there is only one heart which is afflicted? By heavens, you do me an injustice!" he exclaimed in an impassioned tone, as he seized Octavia's right hand and clasped it forcibly.

"Oh! your sufferings, George, are light and tolerable indeed when compared with mine," said the unhappy girl, with an expression of hopeless misery in her deep blue eyes and on her exquisitely chiselled lip. "When affliction falls upon the heads of two persons who love tenderly 'tis the fate of the weaker to bear the heavier load; and if the sacrifice of a broken heart be demanded, 'tis poor woman's invariable doom to become the victim. Yes—all the wretchedness as well as all the dishonour must be borne by her! Blasted with the lightnings of her passion, she is stricken into an early grave! Oh! these are truths to which Man cannot close his eyes," exclaimed Octavia, with an agonised intonation that betrayed all the poignancy of her anguish: "and yet does he persecute Woman with his unlawful love! Why did you make me your victim?" she demanded, with an abruptness that was wild and almost fierce: "wherefore did you pour into my soul the poison of your own passion? You found me gay, and happy, and smiling—contented and innocent—an untutored creature seeking not the terrible experience of love: and what have you made me?—to what have you reduced me? Where is the hope of my youth? Shivered, like glass, into a thousand pieces that now reflect, whichever way I turn, the hideous image of despair! Restore me to that pedestal of innocence whence you have dragged me down—give me back mine honour! You are a Prince

—the son of a King—one day to be a King yourself—and you have power to do more than ordinary mortals: else is your rank a mockery—your might a delusion! Prove yourself as great as the world believes you to be,” exclaimed the wretched girl, starting from her seat—half-maddened by the excitement of her over-wrought feelings; “release me from the spells wherewith you have enchanted me—raise the terrible incantation that rests upon me—”

“Octavia—Octavia!” cried the Prince, in a tone which appeared to have caught the infection of her wildness—for the fear that her senses were abandoning her had driven him almost to despair; “I implore you—by every thing sacred, I conjure you to tranquillise yourself!”

“Oh! ’tis so easy for you to preach tranquillity,” she exclaimed, bitterly, —“you who suffer so lightly! But the time may come, however,” she added, with a strange abruptness and an expression of countenance that seriously alarmed the Prince,—“the time may come when remorse shall touch your soul—when the worm of compunction shall gnaw your heart;—and then, although your sovereign rank may gild your agonies, yet shall the memory of the poor girl whose love you won and whose heart you broke, return again and again to torture you when stretched upon a restless couch you court slumber in vain, and when no eye sees you save His from whose presence no man can fly.

“Octavia! you are killing yourself with excitement,” cried the Prince; “and you are driving me to desperation! What means this change of humour?—why reproach me *now*? Scarcely ten minutes have elapsed since you were almost happy in the conviction that my heart is thine—indissolubly thine—”

“No—no—I was not happy!” she exclaimed, struggling to release her hands from the grasp in which her Royal lover again held them. “And if I were, it was criminal on my part to be so! For new ideas spring up every moment in my mind—new intuitions give an impulse to my thoughts. The walls of this room are dissolving into thin air,” she continued, stretching out her arms wildly and glaring with terrible excitement around: “the world without becomes revealed to me—the whole earth develops itself to my ex-

perience—the human heart is opened to my penetration—”

“Merciful God—she is raving!” cried the Prince, gazing upon Octavia Clarendon with looks wherein anguish was blended with terror and dismay.

“Nothing now is unknown to me—not a secret is hidden!” she continued with rapid utterance and fierce gesticulation—while her hair, dishevelled again and flowing over her shoulders, gave her the air of Pythoness. “A film has fallen from my eyes—a veil has been withdrawn from my mind. I can read my own heart—and I understand yours. I am the victim—and you triumph—”

“Octavia! Octavia!” ejaculated the Prince, seizing her in his arms and endeavouring to stifle her maniac words with kisses.

“Release me!” she screamed, struggling violently. “Your breath is hot—’tis a serpent’s venom—”

“Silence;—in the name of God silence!” cried his Royal Highness, still retaining her in his arms. “You will alarm the house—”

“I care not!” screamed the wretched girl. “Release me, I say—”

“Suffer me to bear you to the sofa—lie down and compose yourself—”

“No—ten thousand times no!” she shrieked, her voice becoming frantic and her struggles desperate.

“My God! do you think that I will hurt you!” exclaimed the Prince, driven to despair.

“Yes—you are a serpent—your coils environ me!”—and a piercing, rending, thrilling scream burst from her lips, as she broke away from his Royal Highness.

Madly she rushed towards the door—it opened violently just as she was within three paces of it—and several of the Prince’s dependants burst into the room.

“Let me go!—let me pass!” shrieked Octavia—possessed by heaven only knows what dreadful hallucination.

“Stop her!” thundered the Prince: “I command you to stop her!”

The door was closed instantaneously—and Octavia was seized upon by the servants.

For a few moments she stood still and mute as a statue—and it seemed as if the large blue eyes that now gazed so vacantly upon his Royal Highness, were fixed for ever; but the instant that he began to approach in order to soothe and tranquillise her, she gave a sudden start—burst from the depend-

ants who held her—and threw up her arms wildly.

The menials seized upon her again ; her countenance grew abruptly distorted with a frantic expression—and a terrible laugh which pealed from her lips spoke out the appalling truth.

Octavia Clarendon was maniac !

CHAPTER XCV.

THE LOVES OF THE PRINCESSES.

WHILE this painful scene was occurring at Carlton House, a conversation of interesting character was taking place at Windsor Castle between two of the daughters of George III.

In a magnificently-furnished apartment, about which were all the scattered evidences of female tastes, the Princesses Sophia and Amelia were seated together in a window recess. A shade of pensiveness was upon the countenance of each royal lady : and in the amiable spirit of sisterly reliance and confidence, they retained each other's hand in a fond clasp.

We have already described their personal appearance ; and the reader is therefore aware that they possessed a beauty of no ordinary character. Complexions more dazzlingly fair—eyes more deliciously melting—charms more luxuriant and voluptuous, it would be impossible to conceive. They were the true types of the female portion of the family of Brunswick—precocious in the development of their forms—their countenances indicating the strength of the desires which warmed their bosoms—their lips especially evincing the sensuality of their temperament—and their eyes usually swimming in a soft languor, but susceptible of being lighted up with the fires of the most impassioned ardour.

Of the two, the Princess Sophia was more essentially gross in her feelings and more thoroughly sensuous in her longings than the Princess Amelia. To the former, Love was a passion in which the appetite for gratification was stronger than the pure affection for the object : to the latter, it was a more sweet and agreeable emotion though still voluptuous even in its refinement. But then the Princess Sophia had lost her chastity and had plunged headlong into the enjoyments of fruition—whereas the Princess Amelia was still in the possession of her virgin inno-

cence although her imagination was inflamed even to prurency.

And they both loved : yes—these royal ladies experienced the influence of the tender passion as well as the meanest of mortals : but less happy, less fortunate than even the humblest, and lowest, and poorest of the sons and daughters of toil, they knew that their hands could never be bestowed where their hearts had already been given !

But let us listen to the discourse which is now taking place between them ; and we shall acquire a deeper insight into the secrets which, in the confidence of a true sisterly love, they were now revealing to each other.

"I am glad, my beloved Sophia," said the Princess Amelia, who was a year younger than her sister,—"I am glad that some secret and unaccountable impulse prompted us to open our hearts to each other this morning."

"The impulse is not unaccountable," observed the Princess Sophia, in a soft and subdued tone. "The truth is, Amelia, we yearned to exchange a mutual confidence—we felt that it would relieve our minds of a weight were we to unbosom ourselves to each other—and we have acted in obedience to the inspiration."

"Yes—you have properly defined the motive which led to all that has this morning passed between us," returned the Princess Amelia. "Alas ! my poor Sophia, you are far more unhappy than I—for he whom you love is already your husband in the sight of heaven, and the father of your child—"

"Hush, dearest Amelia" murmured the elder sister : "for heaven's sake subdue your voice to the lowest possible whisper when you allude to that tremendous secret. Oh ! with burning cheeks—with throbbing brows—and with palpitating heart, did I throw myself into your arms, my beloved Amelia, and breathe in your ear, that fatal truth which involves alike my happiness and my honour ! But I do not repent having revealed that secret to you—Oh ! no, my dearest sister, I do not repent—for you can now afford me your pity, your sympathy, and your consolation !"

* In order to suit the purposes of our narrative, we have taken a slight liberty with the age of the Princess Amelia, by making her a little older than she really was at the period (A. D. 1795) of which we are writing.

"And I do compassionate you, Sophia—profoundly compassionate you," said the Princess Amelia, flinging her robust white arms about her sister's neck and embracing her affectionately. "In loving General Barth, you have bestowed your affections upon a man in every way worthy of them—"

"No—not in every way, Amelia," interrupted the elder sister, with an accent of bitterness marking the profound melancholy of her tone: "not in every way—for he is not a Prince!"

"Alas! is it not terrible that etiquette and cold formality should surround us as with a wall of adamant?" exclaimed the Princess Amelia: "is it not unnatural that our passions and feelings, though the same as those which animate the humblest peasant, are to be curbed by laws and statutes? Marriage to us can never be associated with the heart's feelings: it must prove nothing more than a cold ceremony—a glacial convention resulting from expediency—"

"Marriage, my sweet sister, is with me impossible," interrupted the Princess Sophia, subduing a sob by a great effort. "Think you that situated as I am—being a mother, and with my secret known already to several persons—I should ever dare accompany a suitor to the altar? No, dearest Amelia—it is impossible; and if our parents should seek to dispose of my hand, I would rather throw myself at their feet and confess everything than allow them to confirm any matrimonial negotiation on my behalf. But you, Amelia—you may hope—"

"No, dearest Sophia," exclaimed the younger sister; "marriage likewise becomes impossible for me! I have already told you that I love Sir Richard Stamford—and I feel that my happiness is bound up in this passion which has obtained such speedy, prompt, and despotic empire over my soul. Only one week has elapsed since we first encountered each other under circumstances so strange—so remarkable;—and since then we have met every day," added the Princess, concealing her blushing countenance in Sophia's bosom. "His misfortunes had already engendered a profound sympathy in my heart, even before I ever beheld him; and I was therefore prepared to love him tenderly and well."

"And he knows not that you love him thus?" said the Princess Sophia, interrogatively.

"He may perhaps conjecture that is the fact," answered Amelia: "but no avowal of the state of my feelings has issued from my lips. Oh! no—it were indelicate in the extreme to give utterance to a word calculated to reveal all I experience for him! Our acquaintance has been so short—and he is so profoundly absorbed in the contemplation of those misfortunes which have fallen upon his head—!"

"And yet he must conceive it to be strange that you have thus met him daily since the morning when you first became personally known to each other?"

"Alas! I am well aware that my conduct is imprudent in the extreme," said the Princess Amelia: her superb bosom heaving with a profound sigh: "nay, more—he may even look upon it as unmaidenly—undignified—improper! But I must submit to any opinion which he may form, however derogatory—for I feel that I love him more than my own life. He is handsomer, if possible than our eldest brother, whom he so much resembles; and his sorrows have invested his countenance with a shade of pensiveness which give an ineffable attraction to the perfect manly beauty of his features. His voice is soft and touching, without losing its proper masculine intonation: his form is finely proportioned;—and his manners are more than polished and agreeable—they are absolutely winning. How, then, can I be blamed for loving one who is in every way so worthy of an attachment the most devoted—the most sincere—the most fervent that woman's heart is capable of bestowing?"

"I do not blame you, my sweet sister," murmured the Princess Sophia: "heaven knows that I have neither the inclination nor the right to reproach you. On the contrary, I deeply sympathise with you. But beware, Amelia—beware, dear girl," continued the elder lady, now blushing deeply in her turn,—"lest your love betray you into frailty, and your lot should become as unhappy as mine!"

"Sophia," answered the young Princess in a tone so melting and tremulous that it was scarcely audible,—"I have reflected well upon all the probable consequences of this love which I have formed—and I am prepared to make any sacrifice and incur any risk, rather than surrender an attachment in which my earthly happiness is so

deeply involved. If my only chance of safety be in refusing to meet Sir Richard Stamford any more, assuredly I shall not adopt that course."

"And yet you know not whether your love be reciprocated, my dearest sister?" observed the Princess Sophia, gazing fondly on the blushing countenance of the charming and infatuated Amelia.

"I have already told you," she replied, "that he is absorbed in the misfortunes which have overtaken him. But on each occasion that we meet, he listens with a more evident pleasure to the words of solace which I pour into his ears: he calls me his good genius—his kind angel;—and he begins to acknowledge that there is yet hope for him in this world. Ah! my dearest Sophia, you must not suppose that this love of mine can fail to touch a reciprocal cord in *his* heart! He welcomes me as his consoler—he already looks upon me as his best and sincerest friend—and he assures me that his heart will ever cherish the most fervent gratitude. Oh! there is something sublimely interesting in those interviews which take place between us," exclaimed the impassioned and enthusiastic Princess her countenance glowing with animation and her eyes swimming in a liquid radiance.

"God grant that you may always speak of them in the same tone!" ejaculated the Princess Sophia. "But there are moments, dearest Amelia," she continued her voice and manner suddenly assuming an ominous solemnity,—"when I doubt the possibility of permanent happiness for any member of our family."

"Merciful heaven!" cried the younger sister, a strong shudder convulsing her frame: "this is an echo of the same misgiving which has so often disturbed my own mind."

"And I fear that it is not altogether unfounded, Amelia," returned the Princess Sophia. "Our ancestors have been guilty of terrible crimes—the records of Hanover and Brunswick could make revelations that would cause the blood to run cold and the hair to bristle up in horror. The vengeance of heaven is now falling upon the present generation of our race—and an appalling sense of this truth strikes upon my heart. Oh! the millions who worship Royalty in this country, little think how unenviable are often the feelings of those whom they thus blindly adore!" added the elder sister with a

bitterness which grated terribly upon the ears of the younger lady, "And do you know," she continued, sinking her voice to the lowest audible whisper, "that I have latterly experienced devouring terrors lest that dreadful affliction——"

"Oh! our dear father's malady," interrupted the Princess Amelia, with a still more visible shudder than before: and then there was a long pause, during which these two young and royal ladies looked up each other in dark and sinister silence.

"But let us not think of *this*—let us not meet misfortunes half-way!" suddenly exclaimed the Princess Sophia. "God who can afflict, knows likewise how to spare—and His chastisements seldom fall upon the innocent. If our father be undeserving of His wrath, he will perhaps escape a repetition of those trials to which heaven has already subjected him; but if *he* also be criminal in any respect, then may his punishment begin—or rather continue—in this world."

"Oh! let us change the conversation," cried the Princess Amelia, to whose memory rushed all the incidents of that morning when the King was compelled to yield to the demands made upon him by Meagles and the Amazon.

We should however observe that the favourite daughter of George III had not breathed to a soul a single syllable of what she overheard on that occasion;—no—not even to her sister Sophia had she revealed the strange, ominous, and mysterious events which had thus come to her knowledge. For, although she might unbosom the sentiments and the secrets of her own soul,—yet everything regarding her sire she looked upon as solemn and sacred, and thus the Princess Sophia remained in complete ignorance of those circumstances of which the Princess Amelia had become cognizant, and which proved that some tremendous secret was associated with the destiny of England's King.

Rising from the window recess where they had remained for some time seated, and where the confidential outpourings of their hearts' mysteries had taken place, the royal sisters looked forth from the casement upon the vast range of park and pleasure-ground stretching before them.

"It is now mid-day," observed the Princess Sophia, after a long silence: and, bending her eyes significantly on

the blushing countenance of her sister, she said, "Do not remain here Amelia, only for the purpose of keeping me company. I know from all you have told me this morning, that the hour is now at hand when some one will be expecting to meet you yonder."

"Such is indeed the truth, dearest sister," murmured the younger lady, a sigh of pleasure escaping from her lips. "But you, my beloved Sophia," she exclaimed, a sudden thought striking her,—*"have you no hope of soon beholding again the object of your affection?"*

"Yes," answered the elder Princess: "a letter which I received yesterday tells me that General Barth will be in London in the course of next week—and I shall then return to St. Jame's palace."

"Will he not ask to be allowed to embrace his child?" inquired the Princess Amelia, gazing tenderly up into her sister's countenance.

"No—for that child can never be recognised by either of its parents," was the melancholy response.

Amelia pressed Sophia's hand in token of the sincerest sympathy—and then hurried from the apartment.

CHAPTER XCVI.

A BRITISH WORKING MAN AND

HIS FAMILY.

WE must now return to Camilla Morton—or rather Rose Foster: for the reader is doubtless well aware that the orphan girl had entered Mrs. Brace's establishment under the former name, which she had assumed for the reasons set forth in the letter that she had addressed to Tim Meagles.

A week had elapsed since we saw her hurrying madly along, in that vile neighbourhood which lies in the immediate vicinity of Westminster Abbey: and it will be recollected that we left her at the moment, when a vertigo seizing upon her, she sank deprived of sense upon the door-step of a house.

And where do we find her now? Let us endeavour to depict a scene which, full of harrowing details though it were, was but the type of thousands of such spectacles existing *then*, and of myriads existing *at the present day*!

In a wretched garret a small family

was grouped in all those unstudied but painful attitudes which denote misery and despair.

A man, belonging to the industrious class was seated upon a broken chair; and every lineament of a countenance naturally good looking, but awful, care worn, evinced the ravages of famine and the poignance of acute mental anguish. His form, strongly built when in vigorous health, was so wasted that his poverty-stricken clothing hung loosely upon him—thus rendering him a ghastly object, piteous indeed to contemplate: for it was a being made in the image of God who was thus reduced by destitution, and want, and sorrow to that lamentable condition in which he appeared to be dying by inches.

In another part of the wretched room, a woman was suckling a babe. Suckling!—no—no—that is not the term: for the fountain of her infant's life was dried up in her bosom—and the child was pulling feebly at a withered breast. O God! what language can convey an idea of the shocking appearance of that poor mother and her innocent babe? Emaciated were they both—so emaciated that the woman seemed but the shadow of what her former self must have been—and the child lay with the lightness of a feather on her thin, fleshless arm. Her cheeks were sunken and of corpse-like paleness: her eyes were hollow, with large blue circles about them;—the colour had even fled from her lips, leaving them white as if Death had imprinted upon them the cold kiss of the tomb;—and her entire appearance was so wan—so woe-begone—so full of despair, that it seemed as if Misery had taken a human shape and had become personified in her.

The babe—the poor babe over which she bent, was about nine or ten months old: but it scarcely appeared to have numbered as many weeks. The little being was so emaciated as to be only skin and bone, and instead of having that roundness of face which usually characterises even the infant of tenderest age its cheeks were as sunken as those of its mother. There was no vivacity in it—scarcely any motion. Dull and quiet it lay—not turning its head round every now and then at the sounds of voices—and never once experienced the sunlight of a smile to break upon the frozen

winter of its sad and cheerless infancy.

And as the starving mother bent over the famished babe, an expression of such rending despair would sweep from time to time athwart her countenance that, although her lips were silent, it was easy to read upon her features the words of agony which she repeating in the depths of her heart—kept, “Holy God! what will become of poor hapless child?”

Near her was a little boy of about eight years old, and with a countenance that was intended by nature to be round, ruddy, and laughing in expression. But, merciful heaven! how spirit-broken—how thin—how tortured with hunger—and how wretched he looked! Languid—exhausted—with hollow eyes in which starvation’s demon glared—and shivering in the scanty clothes that hung loosely on his wasted frame, the little fellow presented a spectacle that would have drawn tears from a being of even iron heart,—aye, from the eyes of any one save a King, a Queen, an Aristocrat, or a Poor Law Commissioner!

Upon the floor of this wretched garret, another boy—about thirteen years of age—was seated, endeavouring to soothe to the best of his ability a young sister who was between six and seven. The miserable girl was crying for bread; and her brother, as famished as herself, was whispering in her ear all the fondest assurances and the brightest hopes his fancy could conjure up, but the realisation of which he was quite old and experienced enough to doubt in the blank bitterness of his own despair!

And, leaning against the wall—pressing her hand to her throbbing, burning brow—Rose Foster was endeavouring to steady those thoughts which were excited to an agonising pitch by the contemplation of the appalling scene of misery that was before her eyes, and in which she also shared!

Misery!—merciful God, every one and everything in that garret bore the impress of misery the direst—the acutest—the most poignant that ever entered the habitations of the oppressed millions of these realms! It was a misery which knew no compunction—no remorse: a misery that was as unsparing as a tax-collector—as relentless as an overseer—as cold and implacable as a poor-law guardian. Although the weather was as chill as if

that garret were surrounded by Spitzbergen ice, yet not a spark glimmered in the grate, which was black and cheerless. A candle stuck in a bottle gave forth light enough to bring into relief all the most appalling details of this scene of woe. The flickering beams, playing upon the countenances of the famished family, showed all that ghastliness of feature the wanness and anguish of which they could not possibly enhance. A few articles hung to dry upon a line stretching across the room; and the exhalation of the dampness sent a keener and more piercing chill to the marrow of those bones which had so little flesh upon them to serve as a natural barrier to the icy atmosphere.

Oh! that some great artist could have transferred to his canvass this spectacle the harrowing outlines of which no language can depict with an appropriate vividness,—that he could have drawn Misery eating into the flesh, and sucking the blood and making its way to the very hearts of those parents and their famishing offspring,—and that, when his work was accomplished, he could have exhibited it to the assembled Royalty and Aristocracy of the country, exclaiming, “Behold a life-like representation of that appalling wretchedness and woe which emanate from *your* selfishness—*your* tyranny—*your* abhorrent cruelty!”

Almighty God! what have the millions done that they should be doomed to endure such hideous suffering in their passage from the cradle to the tomb?—and what have the favoured few done that they should revel unceasingly in all the enjoyments, luxuries, and elegance of life?

But let us continue the thread of our narrative.

The man whom we have already represented as being seated in an attitude of despair was the head of this starving family whom we have described. The emaciated woman was his wife—the famishing children were his own. His name was Melmoth and he was by trade a journeyman hatter. But having, at a public meeting of operatives, dared to express his political opinions with a frankness displeasing to the upholders of all the atrocious abuses which render this country a shame and a scandal in the history of civilisation, he was immediately signalised as a victim. The clergyman of the parish denounced him as a “seditious fellow”—and his employer turned

him adrift at a short notice. Vainly did he apply for work elsewhere; his name was known in connexion with democratic sentiments—and, because he was independent enough to express what he thought and felt, starvation became his doom in this land which boasts its freedom, its intelligence, and its charity.

Such was the origin of Melmoth's misfortunes. Months had passed since the ban of a selfish and vitiated society had thus been placed upon him; and, although bearing an unblemished character for sobriety, honesty, and ability in his craft, he was unable to obtain employment. At first the little savings made by his frugal and excellent wife were encroached upon: these soon went—and then the superfluous raiment began to disappear. Next, the furniture was rendered available to supply the means of sustaining life;—and the little articles of comfort having been converted into bread, the necessities followed. Day after day was the shop of the pawn-broker visited by either Melmoth or his wife; and on each occasion the barrier between their family and utter destitution grew less and less. In proportion as their worldly possessions disappeared, gaunt misery became more clearly developed in all its hideous outlines to their view. Every time a coat, or a gown, or a chair was removed from the decreasing stock, poverty grew more plainly visible. The spectral form of famine took larger proportions, in order to fill up each successive gap which the exigences of the day and the assistance of the pawn-broker made in the apparel and the furniture of this doomed family. And every mouthful of bread thus procured, was eaten with a sharper pang and moistened with more plentiful tears.

At length the dreaded moment arrived,—that moment when the four bare walls had "destitution" written in unmistakable letters upon their otherwise blank surface—when the cupboard was empty—when the bedding had all disappeared, and the shivering children slept upon a sack filled with straw—and when only a broken chair, an old chest, and a few poor rags of clothing were left! Yes—this awful moment came,—that crisis whose approach had been marked with shuddering looks and with eyes that could not be averted;—it had come—this fatal phase in the history of poverty and suffering,—and, terrible even in

the distance as it had appeared, there was in its presence a reality so stern, so remorseless, so excruciating; and so thoroughly maddening, that God alone can tell what hope now sustained the wretched parents as they felt starvation themselves and beheld their children dying by inches before their eyes!

It was evening—nine o'clock in the evening, when we thus introduce the Melmoth family to our readers. The man and his wife had not tasted food for forty-eight hours: the boy of thirteen had fasted for twenty-four hours;—and the last crust—stale and scanty, heaven knows—had been divided in the morning between the younger lady and the girl. Rose Foster had passed as long a period as Melmoth and his wife without eating;—and thus every soul in that garret was hungering unto death. The man and the woman—the young lady—the three children—and the infant,—seven human beings in all,—were starving—perishing through famine—wasting away with want.

And yet these seven human beings were dwelling in a land teeming with wealth,—in a city to whose bosom the commercial navies of the world wafted the produce of the fairest climes of the earth,—yes—dwelling in this London where the luxuries of life abounded as amply as the necessities, and where the granaries, the provision-shops, and the markets were stored with a profusion which the promptitude of supply, produce, and import, rendered inexhaustible!

These thoughts swept through the reeling, rocking, maddening brain of Melmoth, as he cast a rapid glance around and beheld the babe feebly pulling at its mother's withered breast—the mother herself appearing the very image of despair—the boy of eight beginning to whisper, in half-frightened tone and manner, an imploring prayer for food—the little girl crying bitterly—the elder boy ceasing his attempts to soothe her because he himself was now goaded by the poignancy of famine—and Rose Foster leaning in ineffable anguish against the naked wall of the wretched, cold, and cheerless garret.

It was nine o'clock, we said—and Melmoth had not been in above a quarter of an hour. During the entire day had he sought for work—and the invariable answer, when he told his name, was a stern negative. He would have given a false name—he would

have done anything short of an actual crime, in order to have been enabled to carry home hope to his destitute family: but that deceit would not have availed him—for references would have been required! And now—beggared, starving, famishing and with this appalling spectacle of misery before his eyes—he felt for the first time in his life as if he really *could* perpetrate a crime to obtain bread for those perishing little ones!

On returning home—great God! such a home as it was!—on the evening to which we are referring, the almost maddened man had flung down his battered hat upon the trunk which once was filled with good clothes, but which now was empty; and sinking exhausted on the broken chair, he threw one glance of hopeless misery around—and then fell into the reverie of dark despair. No word escaped his lips: he had not a syllable of hope to give—and the atmosphere of that garret was already too cheerless and too redolent of woe to need the breath of his intense affliction to enhance its bitterness. The moment the door had opened, his wife threw one searching, inquiring look upon him: but she read the answer in his countenance—and, with a bursting heart, she bent down her eyes again upon the wan, thin face of the famished babe that lay so lightly on her arm.

Thus a quarter of an hour passed—and not a word was spoken in that habitation of misery.

At length Rose Foster appeared suddenly to receive the inspiration of some hope or to make up her mind to some particular course; and, advancing towards the unhappy man, she laid her hands upon his shoulder, saying, "Mr. Melmoth, *this* cannot continue: happen what may, I am determined to go at once and appeal to the bounty of Mr. Meagles."

As these words, uttered in a tone combining firmness with deep pathos, fell upon the ears of the working man who had no work to do, he raised his eyes with an expression of thankfulness—as much as to say, "Yes—go, I implore you:"—but when he beheld that countenance of soft and touching beauty, and marked the air of virgin innocence which characterised the maiden, he relented from his own selfishness—and, desperate as the emergency was, he said, "No, Miss—I cannot consent to your adopting a course which may lead to your ruin."

"But perhaps you are deceived in Mr. Meagles," she urged, timidly.

"I know, as I have already told you, Miss, that he is the boon companion of the Prince, and panders to all his most detestable vices," responded Melmoth. "This is notorious, young lady—and I cannot be so thoroughly heartless and selfish as to let you run headlong into ruin and disgrace."

"No—we will perish sooner than be the means of having a hair of your head injured," observed Mrs. Melmoth, in a tone naturally soft and pleasing, but which want and misery had rendered weak, plaintive, and tremulous.

"Oh! it grieves me to the soul," exclaimed the young maiden, tears streaming down her cheeks,—“to think that people possessed of hearts so excellent as yours, should be plunged into such an abyss of misery. It is my duty—my bounden duty to do all I can—yes, and dare every peril that may spring up in my path, so long as there is the slightest chance of procuring bread for these poor children! Think you, my dear friends, that I am unmindful of all you have done for me? Oh! no—no,” she cried with the enthusiasm of a fervent gratitude: “if years and years had passed since *you*, Mr. Melmoth, first brought me hither—yes, if many years, instead of a few days had passed since *then*—my memory would remain equally vivid and my thankfulness equally sincere.”

“Would to God I had the means of assisting you substantially, dear young lady!” ejaculated Melmoth, clasping his hands in the bitterness of his mental anguish. What I have done for you is nothing. I found you senseless upon the door-step of this house—

“And while the landlady and the other lodgers reproached you for paying any attention to a mere stranger,” interjected Rose emphatically,—“your excellent heart would not permit you to be deterred from performing an act of generosity—of charity—of benevolence.”

“Do not speak of it, young lady,” said Mrs. Melmoth. “My husband was incapable of deserting or neglecting a fellow-creature whom he found in such a condition and when you told us your artless tale and it appeared by the description you gave of the Mr. Harley who persecuted you that he could be none other than the Prince of Wales—

“Yes,” ejaculated Melmoth, starting

from his seat in an excited manner and gesticulating fiercely,—“when we found that you were a good and innocent girl who had escaped from the snares of the Prince only to fall into the hands of a gang of robbers who plundered you of all you possessed—and when we thus ascertained that you were the victim of those circumstances which resulted from the vile persecution that he had attempted against you—we were more than ever resolved to protect you to the last. For it is the countenance and support of bad Kings and Princes that enable the Aristocracy to tyrannise over the people; and the middle classes especially, catching the terrible infection of despotism and selfishness, from the grade above them, grind us poor working men down to the very dust. But what are you thinking of doing, Miss?” demanded Melmoth abruptly, as he saw that Rose was putting on her bonnet.

“Grant me your patience for one moment,” said the gentle maiden. “Seven days ago you found me senseless in the street—upon the door-step of this house. You rendered me assistance—you left me not to perish unaided there, as the heartless landlady and the other lodgers would have done—but, though crushed to the earth by the weight of your own afflictions, you nevertheless bestowed your sympathy upon me. Your excellent wife joined you in this benevolence—she shared in the generosity of the deed. I told you my tale without reserve—and you believed me at once. I might have been a designing, artful girl—and then how your confidence would have been misplaced! But your own good hearts prompted you both to put faith in the poor friendless stranger—and you bade me remain with you. Nay, more—you even persuaded the landlady of the house to grant me a lodging until I could obtain needle-work and pay her—”

“And that work, my dear young lady you have been, alas! unable to procure,” said Mrs. Melmoth, in a voice that was broken by deep sobs. “Would to God that you had succeeded, for your own sake! But heaven alone knows what is to become of us all!” she added, as she threw a glance of despair upon the babe that was now moaning with a low and subdued plaintiveness in her arms.

“I was about to tell you what is to become of us,” exclaimed Rose emphatically. “We must obtain bread—

bread, at any risk—at any sacrifice—bread for those dear children at least, if not for ourselves! And if I recapitulated all that you have done for me, my good friends, it is merely to convince you that I am mindful of your generosity—”

“Generosity!” replied Melmoth, bitterly but not sarcastically; “we had nothing to give!”

“Yes—I have eaten at your expense—I have obtained a lodging on your credit—I should have been a houseless, starving unfriended wanderer without you,” said Rose with a voice and manner of fervid gratefulness; “and I cannot see your children perish before your eyes without making an effort to save them. Despite, therefore, of all you have told me concerning this Mr. Meagles, I will hasten to him—I will throw myself at his feet—I will implore him to succour you—”

“God bless you, Miss Foster!” cried Melmoth, grasping both her hands and pressing them forcibly in his own: “God bless you, dear young lady—but this must not be! You will only run into the snares of your enemies—you will be delivered over to the Prince—”

“I cannot think that Mr. Meagles is capable of such treachery!” said Rose, interrupting the journeyman hatter. “I have already explained to you the circumstances under which I formed his acquaintance—the kindness which he then manifested towards me—the assistance he rendered—the delicate attentions he paid me—”

“Be assured, Miss Foster, that the blackest treachery lurked at the bottom of all that seeming friendship,” interrupted Melmoth. “He saw that you were beautiful, innocent, and artless—”

At this moment the door was flung violently open; and a short, thin, hatchet-faced woman, with a very vixenish look, made her appearance upon the threshold. The young maiden shrank back in alarm—for she was instantly seized with a presentiment of the coming storm; and the children, terrified by the abrupt and uncereimonious manner of the woman’s entrance, huddled together and began to cry in mournful concert.

“Mrs. Thomas,” said Melmoth, adopting as conciliatory a tone as possible, “I am well aware for what purpose you have come—”

“Then pay me, if you please,” interrupted the landlady—for such the

woman was: "pay me, if you please," she repeated, in that sharp, shrill, penetrating voice which usually belongs to the character of a vixen.

"I must request your patience a little longer Mrs. Thomas," returned the unhappy man, in an imploring tone. "You see that I have been unable to obtain work for the present——"

"And never will!" cried the landlady, her voice swelling into a screech. "They say you've ruined yourself by spouting at public meetings and so on—and the hat manufacturers looks on you with suspicion. They think you'll raise a mob and burn their houses down—and so they won't have nothink to do with you."

"Let us hope, Mrs. Thomas, that things will not continue quite so bad as all this," said Melmoth. "It is perfectly true that I have experienced a great deal of cruel persecution on account of my political opinions: but surely—surely," he added, in a tone of deep feeling, "this unjust prejudice must wear away sooner or later."

"Sooner or later indeed!" shrieked forth the landlady, now worked, or rather having worked herself up to a high pitch of irritability. "And am I to wait till dooms-day for my rent, I should like to know. Here's twenty-six shillings doo from you—and half-a-crown the week's rent for this young woman here—and not a sixpence forthcoming, as far as I can see."

"God knows it is too true!" murmured the unhappy man, turning aside and covering his face with his hands.

At the sight of their father's grief, the wailing of the children became piteous in the extreme. Mrs. Melmoth, rising up with her babe in her arms, endeavoured to say something to pacify the landlady: but anguish choked her utterance—for when she was about to implore the woman's forbearance until the morrow, the sickening conviction rushed to her mind that there was not a single hope left.

"Mrs. Thomas," said Rose Foster, accosting the landlady, whom her sweet tone and manner somewhat mollified for a moment: "I beseech you to grant an hour's delay before you adopt any harsh measure towards this worthy but most unhappy family. Late though it now is, I am going to see a friend——"

Ah! a friend indeed—I've no doubt of it," observed the landlady, throwing a sudden glance of cruel suspicion upon Miss Foster. "But howsomever—it

doesn't matter to me where the money comes from, so long as it does come——"

Do not insult this young lady," exclaimed Melmoth, turning abruptly and sternly round upon the unfeeling vixen: "her conduct is above suspicion!"

"Oh! well—I dare say you will answer for her good behaviour and become bail for her character as you have for her rent," cried the landlady. "But them as bails ought to be substaunshal——"

"One hour—only one hour—and everything shall be paid" exclaimed Rose, writhing under the insult which the woman had so heartlessly levelled at her: and, having thus spoken, she hurried from the room.

There was a pause of nearly a minute during which Melmoth remained uncertain whether to hasten after her and fetch her back, or whether he should allow her to run the risk which he feared she would encounter in paying a visit to Tim Meagles. But while he was wavering between two opposite impulses, the echoes of her light feet descending the stairs rapidly grew fainter and fainter until they ceased altogether. And still he remained motionless in the room—his desperate condition prompting him to suffer the young maiden to put to the test the only alternative to which hope could possibly point.

"Well, I tell you what it is, Mr. Melmoth," said the landlady, breaking silence at the expiration of a minute: "that Miss Foster has gone away to raise money somehow or another—and of course I'm not obliged to know or care by what means. It's just half-past nine o'clock—and I don't mind writing till eleven. My 'usband won't be home till then—and so I've got to set up for him. But if so be the cash isn't forthcoming by that hour, you and your family must all tramp off this very night; and if you won't go by fair means, I shall make free to send for the constable and turn you out by foul. So the matter stands in that there way betwixt us."

Having thus spoken, and without waiting for a reply, Mrs. Thomas hurried down stairs.

Melmoth closed the door behind her, and turning towards his wife, he read despair in the countenance of the unhappy woman as she sank back on the low seat whence she had risen a few minutes previously.

"Holy God! what is to become of us?" exclaimed the wretched man, dashing his clenched fists with terrible violence against his forehead, so that the blows sounded as plainly as if they had been dealt upon the table.

"James—my dearest James, tranquillise yourself!" almost screamed forth his heart-broken wife, now cruelly alarmed by the dreadful excitement to which misery had goaded her husband.

And the children, gathering round their father, clung to his clothes—weeping bitterly, and gazing up in mingled piteousness and alarm towards the countenance which wore an expression alike strange and menacing, and such as had never been observed upon those features until then.

CHAPTER. XCVII.

DESPERATION.

FOR some minutes the persecuted working man remained standing, drawn up to his full height, in the midst of his children. His left hand was thrust into his breast—his right was clenched—and his whole frame shook with nervous tremblings. Terrible thoughts appeared to sweep across his countenance—and his wife, who was a shrewd and intelligent woman, was seized with the sudden fear that some desperate project was springing up in her husband's imagination or that his mind was undergoing a fearful change, the transition convulsing his whole being.

The little boy of eight clung to him on one side—the little girl on the other—and the elder lad stood before him, beseeching that he would be comforted.

But the man stared wildly upon them; and the more sinister grew the workings of his features, the deeper became the impression in the bosom of his unhappy wife that he was revolving some plan the nature of which she shuddered to conjecture.

"James," she said at length—once more rising from her seat, and approaching him with the babe in her arms—that babe which was giving forth a weak, plaintive cry, as if the hand of death were already weighing heavily upon its frail and emaciated form—"James—my dear husband—in the name of God! look not thus upon your

children! See—they are terrified—your manner alarms them. What ails you?—what are you thinking of? Speak—I implore you to speak!"

"Father—dear father—speak!" murmured the elder boy, joining his thin and wasted hands in earnest appeal.

"What am I thinking of?" he exclaimed with the wildness and the bitterness of a maniac, his eyes glaring almost savagely as he spoke: and so terribly threatening did his voice sound that the cries of the children, all save the infant, were immediately hushed—and they gazed with mingled awe and apprehension upon the parent who had never seemed harsh nor unkind to them before. "What am I thinking of?" he repeated—and again the unnatural laughter sounded dread and ominous within the four bare walls of the dismantled, denuded garret. "I am thinking," he proceeded in a tone of concentrated bitterness, "that it is useless to let society make war upon us any longer without the slightest attempt at retaliation! I am thinking that I am a coward—a sneaking, paltry, mean, despicable coward—to submit to a diabolical persecution and offer no enmity in return! I am thinking that a civilised society has no right to hunt any of its members to death—nor to goad them to desperation: if it do, it must take the consequences! I am thinking that honesty amounts to a crime when my wife and children are starving around me and an unfeeling landlady threatens to have us turned forth into the streets;—and I begin to look upon myself as a craven-spirited, pusillanimous, degraded wretch who wants the courage to seize upon those rights which a vitiated system denies him. God never placed us in world to starve: *He* could not have sent these innocent children upon earth to endure all the agonies of that lingering death which famine is inflicting. No—no: it is impossible! We have a right to live—and it was intended that we *should* live, because we were not put upon the earth by our own wish! We did not ask to be born. If we did, then might we be punished for our presumption: but it is not our own fault that we are here;—and since God is good and wise, *He* would not have called us into being merely to leave us in the position of intruders upon the rest of the world. No—I begin to understand things in a new light. We have a right to receive a subsistence from the earth, inasmuch as we have

been placed, upon it by God himself: and if this subsistence be denied to us—if work be refused when we ask for work—if the bread of industry be withholden, then must we take what is not granted!"

"In the name of heaven, James, cease this dreadful language!" cried the wretched woman, whose powers of utterance had been totally suspended for a few minutes while her husband was thus giving vent to the doctrines which, like new intuitions, had sprung up in his mind as suddenly and with all the vividness of the lightning that awes while it dazzles and is terrible in its grandeur.

"Dreadful language!" repeated Melmoth, bending upon his quailing, shrinking wife a look that was even ferocious. "By the living God!" he exclaimed, in a tone of wild exultation—his eyes flashing fire, his nostrils dilating, and his whole form appearing to expand into the dignity of god-like proportions; so that this son of toil—this man of the people—this obscure and starving mechanic became an object terrible to gaze upon in the glory of his wrath and the sublimity of his indignation:—"by the living God!" he cried, "I will submit to all these wrongs no more! Patience is exhausted—and endurance has reached that point when it becomes a crime! Whence are we to obtain food save from those who have self-appropriated the fruits of the earth? Who shall dare tell me that starvation is a doom for which we have no right to reproach our fellow-creatures? Against whom, then must our reproaches be levelled? Not against the Almighty—Oh! no—we cannot perpetrate such a tremendous impiety nor give utterance to such an appalling blasphemy! And yet, since the earth yields enough to maintain all who are upon it, there is a diabolical injustice somewhere when a whole family is perishing through want. Tell me then, wife—you who say that my language is dreadful—tell me in which direction we are to look for the fountain of that injustice. I have already said that we dare not complain against God: and therefore we must accuse Man. Yes—the favoured few are our enemies—the oligarchy are our foes. The bread which by right belongs to my children is now in the mansions of the rich: *they* have stolen it from me! Oh! my beloved babes," exclaimed the man, in a voice of rending agony mingled

with savage vindictiveness, "the food to which ye are justly entitled, has been snatched away from you by the usurpers and the tyrants who have monopolised all the elegances of life and refuse us even the necessities! But this shall endure no longer: I will not kiss the hand that strikes me! Forbearance becomes a flagrant cowardice—and I am resolved how to act. Hear me therefore, my dear wife—thou partner of my woes and sufferings.—hear me also, ye well-beloved children, victims of an accursed condition of society which blesses the few at the expense of the many,—hear me, I say," continued Melmoth, raising his voice until it filled that dismantled garret like the rage of the whirlwind and the fury of the storm,—"*hear me while I proclaim a war to the knife against those whom I regard as my enemies—a crusade without quarter against the oppressors of the millions and the usurpers of their rights—a combat to the death against the miscreants who have made God's earth a paradise for themselves and a hell for all the rest!*"

"James—my God! he is raving!" cried the wretched Mrs. Melmoth, now falling upon her knees before her husband—an example which was instantaneously followed by the two boys and the young girl; and, sobbing bitterly, they all clung round the half-maddened man, who still remained standing in the midst of that starving, woe-begone, perishing family.

"No, wife—I am *not* raving," he exclaimed, his countenance suddenly softening into an expression of boundless compassion and love, as he bent his looks upon those who thus knelt around him. "But I have awoke from a dream—an idle dream—the dream that what the world calls *honesty* was indeed something to be admired, practised, and persevered in. Oh! it was a grand stroke of policy for the spoilers and plunderers of the millions to invent that word *honesty*—to proclaim it as a cardinal virtue—to invest it with even a halo of divine sanctity—to have it preached from the pulpit, written in the laws, and advocated by the press,—oh! it was a masterpiece of ingenuity for ensuring to the few the safe possession and the secure enjoyment of all that they have plundered from the many. But henceforth I discard the doctrine—I scatter to the winds the morality which it inculcates—and I will become what the world denominates a robber and a thief!"

"Oh! no—recall that dreadful menace—recall it, I implore you!" shrieked forth the almost heart-broken wife. "Add not to the misery of our present condition——"

"Father—dear father—do what mother asks you!" exclaimed the children, in united entreaties of anguished fervour. "Pray do not tell us that you will become a robber. It is wicked to be a thief—and you yourself have often told us so, dear father!"

"Yes—but I was a fool—an insensate fool!" cried Melmoth, driven to desperation and pursuing the terrible current of thoughts which had sprung up in his fevered brain and had acquired a complete mastery over his imagination. "Do not fancy, my beloved wife—do not suppose, my dear children—that I will any longer suffer myself to be the victim of those theories which the rich have invented as a protection for their ill-got gains. They have plundered *us*—and yet they dare to maintain that it would be dishonest were we to take back from them the fruit of their own rascality: they have practised a tremendous system of spoliation against ourselves—and yet we are told that it will be wrong to assume the aggressive in return! The word *honesty* constitutes the barrier with which they have surrounded the accumulated produce of their own misdeeds: and the word *dishonesty* is the bugbear with which they seek to frighten away all those who might endeavour to molest them in the enjoyment of their usurped possessions. They have taken away the bread from *me*—from *you*—from all of us;—and I will recover back a portion of what is our due. They have made laws to justify their spoliation and their wrong; and I should be a coward were I not to set those laws at defiance. From this moment, then, do I proclaim war against our oppressors—ravage against the ravagers—invasion against the invaders—desolation against the desolators: yes—by the living God!" thundered Melmoth now worked up to an appalling state of excitement, and gesticulating ferociously,—"*I will plunder the plunderers—I will despoil the spoliators—I will play the brigand against the titled and proudly-born banditti of this realm!*"

And exhausted with the violence of tone and gesticulation which had accompanied this dreadful harangue, Melmoth sank upon the empty chest, gasping for breath and every vein in his forehead swollen almost to bursting.

Then piteous and heart-rending indeed was it to behold the anguished wife and weeping children gathering around that man on whose head lay the heavy responsibilities of a husband and a father,—yes gathering around him with despair depicted upon their wan and emaciated countenance—extending towards him their thin and fleshless hands—and addressing him in prayers of the most passionate entreaty! The woman held up towards him the poor, frail, half-famished babe, as she adjured him to discard the terrible thoughts to which he had just given such startling and horrifying expression: but the low, weak, feeble cry which the infant's lips sent forth struck upon the father's ears and touched a chord that vibrated with maddening effect to his very heart's core.

"Rise, my dear wife—rise, my beloved children!" he exclaimed springing from his seat on the chest, and waving his arms over their heads with the mingled wildness and sublimity of a prophet who foretells grand but dreadful things: "you know not what you say when you ask me to become tranquil. Are ye not perishing before my eyes?—is not the iron of starvation entering in unto our very souls?—and can I, as a husband and a father, remain quiet and behold unmoved the progress of this work of death? No—no—ten thousand times *no!*" he shouted frantically. "I should be the vilest of cowards were I to see you die thus, without making an effort to save you! To hell with honesty, when wife and children are perishing with want!—to hell with all maudlin morality and sickly sentimentalism, when those whom one loves are going down to the tomb through famine and misery! Look at that innocent babe: in a few hours it will be no more—for your bosom is dry, wife—starvation has withered up your breast! May God's vengeance fall upon me if I endure this spectacle tamely! No—by the eternal justice! ye shall have bread—ye shall eat—ye shall not die of want in the heart of a city teeming with abundance. Again I declare that I should be a pitiful coward—a mean-spirited dog—the veriest poltroon that ever disgraced the noble dignity of Man, were I to let you perish thus without making an effort to save you!"

And breaking away from his wife and children, the unhappy man—maddened to desperation—sprang to the door. But he had not time to open

it ere they arrested his progress—surrounded him again—clung to him—implored him not to leave them—and mingled the most passionate entreaties with the bitterest weeping.

"Hark!" he exclaimed abruptly—waving his hand so imperiously that they fell back as if by a simultaneous impulse—and a dead silence suddenly reigned in the room, broken only by the low plaintive cry of the infant. "One—two—three——"

And he counted on until he had numbered eleven: for the church clock was proclaiming that hour at which the landlady was to be paid or the family was to be thrust forth into the street!

"I will go and speak to Mrs. Thomas, said Melmoth's wife: "I will even fall upon my knees at her feet—I will show her this dying child—O God! would that we were all dead—or that we had never been born!"

And the wretched woman sank upon the broken chair, her whole frame convulsed with the agonising sobs that tore her bosom.

"Wife, listen to me one moment!" exclaimed Melmoth, in a tone which though soothing and kind towards her, was nevertheless characterised by a firmness that seemed ominous and even terrible after all the previous outpourings of his fevered spirit: "the hour of our doom has struck! It was the knell of fate which rang in our ears. Our only hope is gone—for you see that Miss Foster has not returned. This was what I expected—what I feared! She has fallen into the hands of her enemies: alas! poor girl—she has encountered dishonour in her generous resolve to seek bread for us. Now, my dear wife, I beseech you to tranquillise yourself—for *my* sake—for your children's sake! You perceive that I am calm—very calm——"

"O God! 'tis a calmness which does me more harm to observe than even the excitement which ruled you just now," said the miserable woman, fixing a look full of terror upon the rigid and implacable features of her husband: for his countenance wore the stamp and impress of an iron determination.

"My resolve is taken," he answered, in a cold voice that trembled not: "and no human tongue can dissuade me from adopting it. The war that I have proclaimed against the few who have usurped the rights and self-

appropriated the food of the many—that war commences this night! Within an hour the first campaign will have taken place. Ere the clock strikes twelve, I swear to you that I shall return—and then, my beloved wife—*then*, my dearest children you shall have bread to eat and money to pay the rent! Yes—by the eternal God!" he exclaimed, in a sudden paroxysm of returning excitement,—
"ye shall neither starve nor become houseless wanderers so long as the wives and children of the accursed brood of hereditary usurpers revel in luxury and abundance!"

Having thus spoken, James Melmoth tore open the door—rushed from the room—and was already half-way down the stairs before his wife and children could even recover from the consternation into which this sudden movement had plunged them. But, in a few moments, a rending cry proclaimed all the anguish which smote the heart of the wretched woman—and then the grief, the tears, and the sobs of the children burst forth anew.

Mrs. Melmoth hastened down stairs in pursuit of her husband: but at the very instant that she reached the bottom of the lowest flight the front door was banged violently behind him.

"Holy God! he is gone," exclaimed the miserable creature, pressing her babe despairingly to her bosom, as she leant against the wall for support.

"But he says that he shall be back in an hour," observed the vixenish landlady, stepping forward from the farther end of the passage: "and then he has promised to pay me. Howsomever, as I don't mean to sit up on purpose for *that*, it will do the first thing to-morrow morning."

"Heaven have mercy upon me and my innocent children!" murmured Mrs. Melmoth, in a tone of concentrated anguish: and without making any reply to the landlady, she slowly dragged her falling limbs up the stairs, back to the garret where the other boy was vainly endeavouring to console his little brother and sister.

CHAPTER XCVIII.

THE YOUNG MAIDEN'S ADVENTURES.

Let us now return to Rose Foster, who upon sallying forth from the house in which the Melmoths lived,

repaired straight to Jermyn Street. The distance between the neighbourhood of Westminster Abbey and the latter place was accomplished in about a quarter of an hour—for the young lady sped rapidly along. It was not however without a feeling of apprehension that she found herself in the close vicinage of St. James's Square, upon which, be it remembered, a portion of Mrs. Brace's establishment looked, and into which Rose had descended on the night of her escape from the Prince of Wales.

Upon reaching Mrs. Piggleberry's house in Jermyn Street, the trembling girl learnt with a profound satisfaction that Mr. Meagles was at home and also disengaged. But even while she was ascending the stairs to his apartment, a misgiving sprang up in her mind—for she thought that if Melmoth's suspicions, or rather representations concerning him, were indeed accurate to the letter, she was encountering a peril that might prove fatal to her honour and her happiness in this world. She stopped short for a moment—she was even inclined to turn back suddenly and beat a precipitate retreat from the house: but the countenances of Melmoth's famished wife and children presented themselves to her imagination—and she continued her way up the stairs, Mrs. Piggleberry guiding her.

A door was thrown open—and in another moment the young maiden found herself in the presence of Tim Meagles.

Starting from the chair in which he was lounging—tossing into the fire the cigar which he was smoking—and almost upsetting the bottle of claret which he had commenced, Meagles bounded towards her, exclaiming, "Miss Foster! is it indeed you? Thank God that we have met again!"

The pressure which he gave her hand in both his own was as warm and cordial as his words were fervent and welcome; and as he led the maiden to a seat, she felt convinced in her own mind that Meagles must have been calumniated to Melmoth, who had misjudged his character accordingly.

"Sit down, Miss Foster—compose yourself—you are agitated—you are pale—but you have nothing to fear in this house," exclaimed Meagles, giving rapid utterance to these assurances. "I know that you have been persecuted—but I thank God that I see

you safe again—and I implore you to look upon me as a friend."

"Oh! Mr. Meagles," cried the orphan girl, bursting into tears,—“if I had not already considered you in that light, I should not have ventured into your presence now. Pardon this intrusion—forgive this boldness—but—”

She stopped short—a faintness came over her—and, pale though she was at first, yet her countenance now grew so suddenly ashy, that Meagles feared she was about to faint. Pouring out a glass of water, he held it to her lips: she had just strength sufficient to imbibe a few drops—and the cold beverage revived her.

"Will you not lay aside your bonnet, Miss Foster?" said Meagles, throwing into his tone and manner as much respectful attention and delicate courtesy as it was possible to convey or imply by those means. "You are aware that I have no wife, nor sister—nor indeed any female relative to whom I can introduce you: but my landlady will pay you due regard—"

"Mr. Meagles," interrupted Rose, now thoroughly reassured with respect to his character, and angry with herself that she had ever suspected his integrity,—“I understand and appreciate at the generosity and delicacy of your conduct towards me:—but inasmuch as I come to you as a friend—nay, more—as a sister would fly for succour and advice to a brother—it is unnecessary that there should be any third person present while I converse with you. But you said that you knew I had been persecuted—”

"Alas! poor orphan girl," said Meagles in a tone of deep feeling, while tears started forth from his eyes; "I have indeed heard of the terrible adventure which you experienced a week ago—and I have been making unceasing inquiries concerning you."

"You, Mr. Meagles!" ejaculated Rose, in amazement.

"Yes—certainly," responded Tim, in a tone of unquestionable candour. "From the first moment that I saw you I felt interested in you—as, my God! who would not be, considering the cruel misfortunes which have overtaken you at so early a period of your life? The note which you sent me some weeks ago, gave me pain—because I had hoped and flattered my-

self that you would condescend to look upon me as a friend. But at the same time I admired your prudence, Miss Foster—and, while I deplored the step which you had taken, inasmuch as it left me ignorant of your place of abode, the good opinion I had already formed of you was enhanced to the highest degree. You now understand, therefore, that I have thought of you often—and very frequently have I wished to know where you were that I might ascertain if you were contented with the new career you had traced out for yourself. Conceive, then my dismay—my grief—my indignation, when I learnt, a week ago, that you had been made the object of a cruel persecution.”

“Ah! Mr. Meagles,” exclaimed Rose, the tears, chasing each other down her cheeks,—“had I consulted you frankly and ingenuously ere I resolved upon any particular proceeding—all that I have endured and encountered would have been avoided. Believing the establishment which I entered to be one of the highest respectability——”

“Oh! what perils have you encountered, Miss Foster!” exclaimed Meagles, abruptly: “for your eyes are doubtless now open to the true character of Mrs. Brace’s house——”

“But how did you learn all that has happened to me?” she demanded. “Report says that you are intimate with the Prince of Wales—and it was as an emissary from his Royal Highness to my poor father, that you first became acquainted with me. I must conclude, then, that the Prince himself made known to you his unworthy conduct and the manner in which I escaped from him—by adopting a course which makes me shudder even now when I think of it——”

“Heroic girl!” ejaculated Meagles, —“I also have shuddered a thousand times on your account ever since the daring exploit was made known to me. Yes—from the lips of the Prince himself did I hear the tale which excited within me a sentiment of abhorrence towards him equalled only by that of admiration in regard to yourself.”

“Was it possible that his Royal Highness knew all along that Camilla Morton was none other than the Rose Foster whom his own wickedness had made an orphan?” inquired the young maiden.

“No—he only ascertained that fact at the last moment—indeed, at the

same time that he discovered your flight,” answered Meagles. “A letter which you had dropped in the hurry and confusion of that memorable night and which his Royal Highness picked up, informed him who you were. But think not, Miss Foster, that he was stricken with remorse—or that if he were, the feeling lasted more than a moment. No!” cried Meagles emphatically,—“that man is incapable; of sentiments permanently generous or noble; and beware, Miss Foster, how you fall in his way! Let us not, however, dwell upon topics so unpleasant. I was ere now telling you that during the last week I have been making unceasing inquiries concerning you—and this is so true that I have neglected many important matters which demanded my attention. But I knew enough of you to be aware that you are inexperienced and confiding: virtuous and well-intentioned yourself, you are naturally prone to place reliance upon others;—and I trembled, Miss Foster—Oh! I trembled lest you should fall into the snares of the artful, the designing, and the unprincipled.”

“Oh! how can I ever sufficiently express my gratitude for all this generous sympathy and friendship on your part?” exclaimed Rose, her voice almost suffocated with sobs. “Alas! alas! I have indeed become the victim of my inexperience—at least so far as my pecuniary affairs are concerned——”

“Tell me all that has occurred to you, Miss Foster,” cried Meagles, “since the night on which you escaped from Mrs. Brace’s house. I am certain you have endured much...your adventures have been of no ordinary description—for you are pale, careworn, altered——”

“Heavens! how can it be otherwise?” exclaimed Rose, suddenly becoming painfully excited as the thought of all she had passed through was recalled with terrible vividness to her mind. “Yes—I did indeed trust to people whom I believed honest—and they plundered me—robbed me, Mr. Meagles, of every guinea of that sum which you yourself had invested in my name at the Bank on England. Oh! why did I not come to you? But I sent—or rather some one pretended to call upon you—and I was assured that you had gone to Scotland——”

“Poor girl! you have been terribly

deceived indeed," said Meagles. "How cruelly has fortune persecuted you!"

"But I have deserved it all for not having relied on your friendship," exclaimed Rose, with passionate vehemence. "Yes—I have deserved it all—even to the starvation—the famine which I have experienced——"

"Holy God! is this possible?" ejaculated Meagles, starting from his chair and fixing his eyes on the orphan girl in dismay. "Starvation—famine—No—no—it cannot be! And I have been eating and drinking of the best—Just heavens! starvation—famine!" he repeated, now becoming terribly excited in his turn. "Alas! alas! those pale cheeks—that altered mien—Oh! Miss Foster,—how is it possible that you could have endured all this without deigning to recollect that I was your friend? But, my God! while I am thus giving way to my feelings, you are suffering with hunger——"

And he sprang towards the bell to summon his valet to spread food upon the table. But Rose, divining his intention, caught hold of his arm, exclaiming, "I require nothing now—my heart is too full—and moreover, I have left kind and generous friends perishing with want——"

"Command me in every way, Miss Foster!" interrupted Meagles. "Tell me how I can serve you or those in whom you are interested. Thank God! my purse is well filled at this moment—and if it were not, I would sell everything to obtain the means of fulfilling your wishes."

"Generous friend! how deep is the debt of gratitude which I owe you!" exclaimed Rose, the tears again streaming down her cheeks. "But grant me your patience a few minutes—and I will tell you all that has occurred to me since the night on which I escaped from the dwelling of Mrs. Brace."

Meagles reseated himself—and Rose proceeded to recount the various adventures with which the reader is already acquainted,—how she fell in with a man and woman who demonstrated the utmost sympathy towards her—how they plundered her of all she possessed in the world—how she experienced a real compassion and kindness at the hands of the Melmoths—and how she had just left that family not only perishing through destitution, but likewise menaced with ejection from the miserable garret that constituted their home,

"Where do these good people live?"

inquired Meagles, again springing from his seat: "I will lose not a moment in repairing to their aid."

Miss Foster mentioned the address—and Meagles put on his hat.

"But I will go with you," she said: "indeed I am glad to avail myself of your escort, at this late hour, to the place which is likewise my home now," she added, with a mournful tremulousness of the voice—for the recent incidents of her life were constantly reminding her of the happy days when she dwelt beneath the same roof with those fond parents who were now no more.

"Miss Foster," said Meagles, "if you wish to return to the lodging which, from all the circumstances you have just revealed to me, I must presume to be a very humble one, I shall conduct you thither as a matter of course. But if you will place yourself in the care of my landlady until to-morrow, when we shall be enabled to consult together upon future arrangements for your welfare and happiness——"

"Mr. Meagles" interrupted Rose, "I have witnessed and shared the misery of the poor family to whom I owe so many obligations—and, as your generosity is about to prove the means of their salvation, I could wish to behold and join the happiness that you are this night destined to raise up in their abode. Permit me, then, to accompany you," she added in a tone of earnest entreaty: "and to-morrow I shall venture to intrude myself upon your presence again—for, alas! the poor orphan, Mr. Meagles, has no other friend on earth save you!"

"And the sincerity of my friendship, Miss Foster, shall be proved by the alacrity and cheerfulness with which I am prepared to fulfil all your wishes. Come, then—and we will hasten together to the abode of these worthy but unhappy people whose hearts were not hardened by poverty nor rendered selfish by misery against the sufferings of a fellow-creature."

Rose darted a look of fervent gratitude upon Meagles, whose honourable intentions with regard to herself now seemed beyond all question; and they sallied forth together, just as the bells of St. Jame's church were chiming a quarter past eleven.

CHAPTER XCIX.

STARTLING INCIDENTS.

ALTHOUGH she had fasted for so many long hours, yet Rose Foster felt not hungry now. Hope had risen up in her bosom,—that hope which was meat and drink to her physical being, and animation and excitement to her spirits. Meagles was proving himself a friend—and they were on their way together to carry succour and solace to the starving family of the working man who was able and willing to work, but could obtain no work to do!

A quarter past eleven!—the hour had gone by at which the rent was to be paid—but by half-past eleven they could reach the Melmoths' lodging in Westminster, and doubtless it would not be too late.

These thoughts swept rapidly through the brain of the young maiden, as, leaning upon the arm of Tim Meagles, she hurried along Jermyn Street: and as it was shorter to cross St. Jame's Square then to go round by Lower Regent Street, she gently drew him in that direction—for the fear of reviving unpleasant reminiscences in her mind was prompting him to take the more circuitous route. But with Meagles as a protector, she dreaded nothing: moreover, her spirits were too elate with enthusiastic hope to allow room for any misgiving or apprehensions.

Firmly and lightly, therefore, tripped the feet of the pale but lovely girl on the pavement of that aristocratic Square; and the moon, breaking from behind a cloud, brought into relief the fronts of the houses on the southern side and showed her the very window whence she had achieved her perilous descent a week back.

The night was cold and partially tempestuous: and scarcely had the silver planet peeped forth from the dark curtains above, when it was obscured again by the dense and ominous masses of clouds—like a beauty coquetting from behind a black veil. Thus, having allowed Rose Foster a transient glimpse of the casement from which her flight had been accomplished, the fickle Goddess of Night disappeared suddenly—and it seemed as if some giant had piled the dark storm-clouds all in a moment before her alabaster throne.

The obscurity in St. Jame's Square was now relieved only by the feeble

glimmering of the oil lamps stationed at wide intervals along the pavement skirting the houses: but the walk bordering the iron railings of the enclosure was involved in a far deeper darkness. The evergreens within the iron fence, a portion of which their branches overhung, formed a black shade in one particular spot; and it was while Meagles and Rose Foster were passing through this gloom, in order to make as short a cut as possible across the Square, that a man suddenly sprang upon them as it were from out of the darkness.

So abrupt and violent was this attack that Meagles, against whom the ruffian had directed his assault, was levelled with the ground, where he lay either dead or senseless; and Rose, losing all all her presence of mind in an instant, darted away screaming for help and raising the cry of "Murder."

The man lost not a moment in profiting by the deed which he had committed. Rifling the pockets of Meagles, he possessed himself of that individual's purse and watch, which he hastily secured about his own person: but before he turned to fly—and although the rending screams of Rose were echoing thrillingly through the Square—he bent for a few instants over the form of Meagles to ascertain whether life had departed. At that moment the moon shone forth again, and its beams falling upon the countenance of Meagles revealed its lineaments to the robber, so that, although he knew not who his victim was, yet he saw enough of his features to have them immediately impressed upon his memory. At the same time he thrust his hand into the breast of the unconscious man and felt that his heart was beating, though with feeble pulsations: then, giving vent to the ejaculation of "Thank God! I am not a murderer yet," he darted precipitately from the scene of his crime.

Meanwhile Rose Foster had fled madly and frantically, without heeding the direction which she was taking—piercing screams still proclaiming her terror; when, all on a sudden, she came in violent contact with a lady who, attended by a tall livery-servant, had stopped short in alarm at the rending voice of female anguish which thus broke frightfully upon the stillness of the place and hour.

"Good heavens! what ails her?" exclaimed the lady, as Rose utterly exhausted, sank fainting into her arms.

At that moment the moon revealed to her eyes the countenance—the well-known countenance—of Rose Foster; and an ejaculation of mingled joy and surprise followed that of alarm which had already burst from her lips. A word summoned the domestic to her side: and the powerful liveried lacquey raising the insensible girl in his arms, bore her hastily along to a house close by.

A few minutes afterwards Rose began slowly to awake to consciousness; and her eyes, as they opened heavily, encountered the light of candles. Casting a gaze around she perceived that she was lying upon the bed in a well-furnished chamber, the appearance of which instantaneously struck her as being not altogether unfamiliar. Pressing her hand to her brow in order to steady her thoughts, she speedily recollected the incidents of the night; and startled by the remembrance that the last event had occurred in St. Jame's Square, she flung a wild and shuddering look around. A terrible suspicion had suddenly sprung up in her mind; and it was now confirmed most fatally:—for the chamber was indeed well known to the unhappy girl—and the never-to-be forgotten countenance of Mrs. Brace was bending over her!

A moan of ineffable anguish burst from the laden bosom of the persecuted orphan—and her senses once more abandoned her.

* * * *

In the meantime Meagles had recovered from the stunning effect of the violent blow which the robber had dealt him; and, rising from the ground he leant against the iron railings while he recalled to mind everything that had happened. Memory performed her part actively; and he found that Rose had disappeared—that he himself had been robbed of his purse and watch—and that his hat had alone saved his skull from being fractured by the desperate assault which had been made upon him with a bludgeon or some similarly heavy weapon, the effects of which were still experienced most painfully.

But what had become of Rose? *This* was his principal consideration; and, caring comparatively nothing for the loss of his purse and watch and the contusion which he had received, he looked anxiously all around in search of the young orphan maiden. Vainly

did he thus plunge his eyes into the obscurity of the night; her form met not his view. In a hurried manner he made the circuit of the Square: still she appeared not. What could have become of her? Perhaps she had returned to his lodgings to procure assistance. Thither he repaired: but Mrs. Pigglesberry assured him that the young lady had not come back. Suddenly it struck him that she might have fled to her own humble abode; and as she had mentioned to him the address of the house where herself and the Melmoths lodged, he decided upon hastening thither without delay.

Towards Westminster Abbey did Tim Meagles accordingly proceed. Although he could not possibly account for Rose Foster's disappearance, and although he felt confident that she had not been murdered nor ill-treated by the same ruffian who had plundered him, it nevertheless did not strike him for an instant that she could have fallen once more into the hands of Mrs. Brace. Hoping, therefore, to find her at the house in which the Melmoths resided, he hastened thither with all speed: but even when he had plunged into the maze of pestilential streets where crime and poverty herded together almost beneath the very shade of the sacred Abbey's towers, he experienced some degree of trouble in finding the dwelling which he sought.

But at last he succeeded; and ere he knocked at the door, he looked up at the house. Every window was dark save one on the uppermost storey; and thence a few feeble rays came forth—poverty's unmistakable rushlight glimmering!

Without farther hesitation, Meagles knocked—not in a commanding manner—but quietly: for he was afraid of compromising the reputation of the young lady by announcing his visit at that late hour in a way calculated to attract attention on the part of the inmates of the dwelling or of the neighbours.

Several minutes elapsed—and he knocked again. At the expiration of a considerable interval, the door was opened—and, by the dim and uncertain light of the moon, Meagles beheld the wasted and emaciated countenance of a lad of about thirteen.

"Does a working man of the name of Melmoth reside here?" asked Meagles: and, without waiting for th

sponse, he added, "Because I am come to relieve him."

"Yes, sir—he does—he is my father," said the lad.

"And Miss Foster——"

"Also lives in this house, sir. But....."

"She is not at home, then?" exclaimed Meagles, his heart sinking within him as that monosyllabic antithesis to hope fell upon his ears.

"No, sir," replied young Melmoth. "She went out at about half-past nine o'clock—and we've been very anxious concerning her ever since. We're afraid she has fallen into some trouble—because she went to see a gentleman who father says is connected with the Prince of Wales."

"That is Mr. Meagles—eh?" observed Tim.

"Yes, sir—the same," was the answer.

"Well,—show me up stairs, my boy," said Meagles, after a few moments' reflection: "I should like to say a word or two to your father. I suppose he is at home?"

"He has been in about ten minutes, sir," replied the youth.

Meagles entered the house, closing the door behind him. The lad led the way up stairs—and Meagles followed in the total darkness which prevailed. At length, on reaching the top storey, the boy threw open a door—and the visitor entered the garret, where the Melmoth family were grouped round the chest on which there were loaves of bread, cold meat, and cheese.

But the instant that Melmoth caught sight of the countenance of Meagles, horror and dismay spread over his own features—and, dropping the food which he was in the act of conveying to his mouth, he staggered back against the wall. At the same moment something dropped from about his person; and the object fell upon the floor with a metallic sound accompanied by the smashing of glass.

"Great heavens! what do I behold?" ejaculated Meagles, springing forward and picking up the object alluded to. "My watch!"—and he held it up by the chain, with amazement and indignation depicted upon his countenance.

A scream burst from the lips of Mrs. Melmoth, as this incident carried to her soul, with the vividness of lightning, the conviction that her husband's temporary absence that night had been marked by a deed stamping him as a criminal!

The elder boy likewise comprehended the meaning of this scene respecting the watch—and his grief burst forth in piteous lamentations: while the other children, alarmed at what they could not however understand, flew to their mother with cries of terror and anguish.

For she had fallen upon her knees—clasping her poor babe to her bosom;—and her eyes wandered wildly from the countenance of her husband to that of Meagles.

And Melmoth himself?—how did he feel? how did he look?

Guilt was written upon every feature of his face and stamped upon every lineament—guilt was expressed in his quailing attitude—his trembling form!—the whole being of the wretched man was guilt personified!

He had not the hardihood to repeat the account that he had given his wife of the way in which he had obtained the means to purchase the food he had brought home with him and to pay the arrears of rent;—he was not so proficient in turpitude as to be enabled to renew and persist in the tale which he had forged to lull asleep the appalling suspicions that had naturally sprung up in the woman's mind, in the first instant, when she saw her husband return with provisions and money. No—he could not put a bold front upon matters now! The watch, which he had concealed about his person, became damning evidence against him: and, suddenly rendered a coward by the discovery of his enormity, the unhappy Melmoth stood in the presence of Meagles like a prisoner awaiting his doom from the lips of a judge!

We have already stated that the first sentiment which seized upon Meagles was one of mingled amazement and indignation: but, as the scream of the wife and the cries of the children smote his ear, his heart relented—and he instantly comprehended the entire truth!

"My good woman," he hastened to exclaim, as he turned towards the poor emaciated mother who had fallen upon her knees in indescribable anguish,— "fear nothing—I will not harm your husband—I pardon him!"

"God bless you—God bless you, kind gentleman!" murmured the woman, in a tone of such grateful fervour—such plaintive earnestness, that Meagles felt he never could have forgiven himself if he had promptly taken that harsh step which so many

in his situation would have adopted. "May God Almighty bless you, sir!" she repeated, her voice gathering more energy from the enthusiasm of her manner. "Children, down upon your knees—and thank this good gentleman for sparing your father—for saving *you* also from a disgrace which heaven grant that you do not understand."

And the children knelt around Meagles—and Melmoth himself burst into a perfect agony of weeping.

Solemnly and sublimely interesting was this scene: for there was the scapegrace adventurer receiving the homage due to the good deed which he had done towards the poor working man whom the bitterness of penury had driven to crime!

"Now let us know each other better, my worthy friend," said Meagles, hastening to raise the woman and her children: then, taking Melmoth's hand, he observed, "I can understand the whole truth of the incidents of this night as plainly as if I had just read them in a book. You need not utter a word of explanation. This room tells *your* tale with a too terrible fidelity," he added, glancing hastily around upon the naked walls: "and if any chapter were deficient in the narrative of woe and suffering, it may be found in the emaciated features of your wife and children. Not for worlds, therefore, would I injure you! I cannot even blame you. By heaven! I would do the same sooner than see those whom I love perishing by inches! And now let me tell you that the gold which you have about you, was actually intended to relieve you."

"Is this possible?" exclaimed Melmoth, sobbing like a child.

"It is true I can assure you," was the response: "and my name is Meagles."

"Oh! what strange incidents have occurred this night!" ejaculated the working man. "But Miss Foster—Ah! something strikes me—My God!—a lady was with you in the Square—and she fled precipitately—rending the air with her screams—"

"Descend not into explanations which may become *too* intelligible," said Meagles, glancing significantly towards the children. "But tell me—do you think that Miss Foster recognised you—"

"No—I am certain she did not," answered Melmoth. "God forbid," he cried in a tone of almost wild excitement: "I am already sufficiently

humbled and miserable enough, without having that crushing idea to overwhelm me altogether. But is it possible, sir, that anything can have happened to that excellent young lady?"

"I am seriously—very seriously alarmed on her account," said Meagles. "When I came back to consciousness, she was gone. I searched for her in the Square—but vainly. What *can* have become of the poor orphan whom misfortunes appear to pursue and persecute with unremitting rancour?"

"Let us go forth and search for her, sir," exclaimed Melmoth.

"It is useless," observed Meagles. "Where can we search? Let us rather hope that some kind persons have given her an asylum for the night, and that to-morrow morning we shall receive gladdening intelligence respecting her."

"God send that such may prove the case!" cried Melmoth.

"I shall now leave you," said Meagles: "but I shall not lose sight of you. As to what has occurred—think no more of it! Poverty engenders much which deserves pity rather than blame; and the good reputation of years must not be considered ruined by the madness of a moment. Farewell for the present—and may better days await you. You will soon see me again."

And, without waiting for a renewed outpouring of the fervent thanks of the Melmoth family, Meagles hastened away. The eldest lad followed him down to the door—and ere Tim could succeed in quitting the house, that grateful boy had seized his hand pressed it to his lips and covered it with his tears.

CHAPTER C.

STAMFORD MANOR.

THE incidents of our tale follow each other in rapid succession; and the stage of our drama is crowded with characters and busy with action. Busier still, if possible, is it short destined to become: and of a deep and more exciting interest are events which yet remain to be told.

All that is most horrible in respect to crime—most pathetic and touching in the sphere of love—most terrible with regard to the oppression suffered by the poor at the hands of

rich—and most startling or rivetting, enthralling or attractive, in reference to variety of incident,—all the features have yet more fully to develop themselves in the progress of our narrative.

To scenes more strange than any yet depicted, will the reader have to be introduced: through the maze of adventures still more mysterious and exciting than those already recorded, will he have to accompany us.

As the subject grows upon us, our energies appear to take the colossal proportions adequate to the task of elaborating it: our imagination expands commensurately with the labour which it has to perform.

To accumulate incident upon incident with a rapidity which flags not, may appear to many the Titanian toil of heaping Ossa upon Pelion—mount upon mountain:—but to us it is a task fraught with its own exciting pleasure.

And so will it seem to us until the end!

We must now request our readers to accompany us to Stamford Manor, which, as stated in the first chapter of this history, was situated at a distance of about three miles from Aylesbury.

It was a handsome building—of imposing appearance externally, and splendidly fitted up within; and the fire which had occurred simultaneously with the appalling tragedy wherein Lady Stamford played the terrible part of the guilty heroine, had not achieved any considerable amount of damage.

On the same night when the incidents just related took place, and at about nine o'clock, a post-chaise drove up to the door of Stamford Manor; and Mr. Page, leaping forth, assisted his wife to descend.

Having dismissed the vehicle, which was hired at Aylesbury, the worthy couple entered the hall; and Mr. Page, addressing the old woman who had admitted them into the mansion, said, "You, I presume, are the person left in charge of the premises?"

"Yes sir—my name is Bryan," was the answer, accompanied by a low curtsy. "I dessay Sir Richard told you to inquire for Mrs. Bryan, didn't he? Leastways, I should think it most likely that he did——"

"My good woman," interrupted Mr. Page,—"I can perceive at once that you are disposed to be garrulous—and there's nothing I like less than garrulity. Your master has written to you,

stating that a gentleman and lady would call here this evening—eh?"

And as Mr. Page gave utterance to the word "lady," he glanced complaisantly towards Julia who was decked out in all the flaunting colours which the worst possible taste could have managed to accumulate.

"Yes, sir," answered Mrs. Bryan: "Sir Richard honoured me with a letter—leastways with a note—which the postman brought over this morning from Aylesbury: or I should say the post-boy, by rights—for he's a mere lad of some sixteen, or so——"

"Never mind how old he is, Mrs. Bryan," exclaimed Mr. Page. "He brought you the letter safe—and that's all we have to care about. But this letter duly informed you that a certain Mr. Page and his lady would probably call here in the evening—is it not so?"

"Yes, sir—and that you would pass the night here," returned the woman; "and I was to mind and make you as comfortable as possible. So I've got you a nice roast fowl for your supper—and put clean sheets on the best bed——"

"Well and good," said the ex-commercial traveller. "I perceive that it becomes altogether unnecessary to inform you that I am Mr. Page," he continued pompously,—and that *this* lady is *my* lady—or, in vulgar terms, my wife. How long will supper be before it's ready?"

"Half-an-hour, sir," was the answer: leastways, three quarters at the outside—'cause there's a bit of ham a-biling to eat with the fowl."

"Well, then," said Mr. Page, in a musing tone as he turned towards his wife, who had been admiring the statues and vases in the marble hall while the preceding colloquy took place between her husband and the ancient domestic: "I think we may as well commence our work this evening. At all events, I should like to sort and seal up the papers to-night."

"What's to prevent us?" demanded Julia. "You have heard that there's three quarters of an hour till supper-time—and we may do a great deal in that interval. For mind you, I don't mean to sleep in this house to-morrow night. It's enough, in all conscience, to sleep here one night—with the reputation that the place has got."

"Oh! that's all nonsense, Julia!" exclaimed Mr. Page. "I only wish Sir Richard would make you and me a present of the Manor on condition

that we must live in it nine months out of every year: I don't think we should forfeit possession, let it be ever so desperately haunted."

"Haunted indeed!" ejaculated Mrs. Bryan, catching at the word as a new pivot whereon her garrulity had an opportunity of turning. "There's no doubt about its being haunted. Why—after the terrible business took place, and her ladyship died, the servants left one after another, 'cause it was soon knowned that the sperret of her ladyship walked——"

"Trash!—nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Page. "An enlightened man—gentleman, I mean—like me, scorns such silly notions. But how happens it that if her ladyship *walks*, as you call it,—how happens it, I should like to know, that you have courage enough to live all alone in the house?"

"Not exactly all alone, sir," replied Mrs. Bryan: "'cause my husband's with me—and he takes care of the grounds. But if we wasn't poor people and glad to earn an honest penny anyhow, I'm sure we shouldn't have undertook the charge of the Manor when the regular servants—house-keeper, gardener, footmen, cook, maids, and all—deserted it in the fashion they did. Leastways——"

"Pray cease to inflict your '*leastways*' upon us, my good woman," said the pragmatist Mr. Page: "and tell us honestly and truly whether you ever saw the ghost of her ladyship?"

"I can't say that I ever seed anything, sir," answered Mrs. Bryan: "but I've heerd a many strange noises which has quite freezed the blood in my veins and made my 'air stand up——"

"Why, you arrant old humbug," ejaculated Mr. Page; "you were a wig! How can you look me in the face, and talk about your hair standing on end? I suppose you will be telling us next that your teeth chattered?" he added, the point of the remark existing in the fact that the ancient dame had no teeth at all.

"Well, sir—I didn't mean no offence," she said, with a good humour that was imperturbable. "When I spoke of my 'air standing on end, it was what I've heerd called a figger of speech—or something of that kind. But raly and truly, me and my husband have heerd strange noises at times!—and if it wasn't an object to us to live rent-free, have the use of the wegetables, and ten shillings a-week

into the bargain—with the chance of being retained in the service of them as becomes the owners of the estate after the sale,—if it wasn't for all this. I was saying, we shouldn't remain here no longer—or yet have stayed so long."

"Then you know that the Manor and the park are to be sold by private contract—eh?" said Page.

"To be sure, sir. A many gentlemen and ladies has been to look at it. They tell us that the sale's to take place next week," said Mrs. Bryan. "I don't know how true the report may be——"

"It is quite true," observed Mr. Page. "Sir Richard Stamford feels that he can never live here again after all that has occurred—and he wants to dispose of the place as soon as possible. Next week, as you have been informed, the sale will most probably be accomplished. I and my lady are intimate friends of Sir Richard's—indeed, I may say we are bosom friends," continued the ex-traveller promptly: "and he has testified his regard for us by honouring us with his confidence on the present occasion. For I suppose you are aware of our purpose in visiting the Manor, my good woman?"

"Sir Richard tells my husband and me in his letter that you're going to take away all the papers and wallyables——"

"Say *valuables*, if you please," interrupted Mr. Page: "it is more classical."

"Well—how much longer is this nonsense going to continue?" asked Julia. "If you mean to look over the papers this evening, we had better begin at once."

"True, my dear spouse," observed Mr. Page. "Now, my good woman, have the kindness to conduct us to the study or library, as the case may be—and if you get supper ready in about three quarters of an hour, it will be time enough. We will attend to business first, and enjoy ourselves afterwards."

Mrs. Bryan lighted a parlour-lamp by means of the candle which she carried in her hand; and she then led the way to the library. Placing the lamp on a handsome desk which stood in the room, she would have renewed the conversation with all the pertinacity of her garrulous temperament, had not Julia unceremoniously bade her retire—an order which she obeyed with perfect good humour and a low curtesy.

Mr. Page deposited his hat and cloak

at a chair, while Julia likewise laid aside her bonnet and mantle; and, having taken a rapid survey of the apartment and its numerous shelves filled with elegantly bound books, they proceeded to inspect the contents of the desk, the keys of which the ex-traveller had in his possession.

"You remember," said Mrs. Page, "that all the correspondence which ever passed between Sir Richard and the bankers is to be preserved."

"I have forgotten none of the instructions which the baronet gave us, my dear," returned Page. "You are quite right—the letters you mention are to be preserved, in case they should be wanted for the winding up of the affairs of the bank. Well, it's a lucky thing for Sir Richard that he will have saved from the wreck of his property so much more than he at first anticipated. It made me quite happy to see him in such good spirits yesterday at Windsor. But what is that bundle of papers you have just taken out of the little drawer there?" demanded Mr. Page of his wife.

"*Correspondence with my Eleanor,*" answered Julia, reading the endorsement.

"That is to be burnt—the whole of it," exclaimed Page. "Untie the bundle and scatter the letters in the grate: they will take the flames more easily in that fashion. And here is another bundle destined to share the same fate: it is endorsed '*Miscellaneous.*' By the bye, wasn't it a strange thing that Sir Richard was walking with the Princess Amelia in Windsor Park yesterday? She is really a sweet pretty young lady. There is something quite royal about her—and even before that park-keeper whom we questioned told us who she was, I had an instinctive presentiment that she was of high birth."

"Of high nonsense!" exclaimed Julia, who was busily engaged in burning the condemned correspondence. "How can one woman be so different from another as all that?"

"I didn't mean to pay you any ill compliment, Julia my love," returned Mr. Page: no odious comparisons, you know—for you're a very pretty and genteel young woman—lady I meant to say—and ought to be a princess. But I was observing that Sir Richard was walking with the Princess in the park, when we went in search of him

pleased that we accosted him while he was with her Royal Highness," interrupted Mrs. Page, returning to the table on which her husband was scattering and sorting the correspondence. "Now—which heap is to be burnt—and which preserved?"

"Take these and throw them into the grate," replied the ex-traveller. "The greater portion is to be destroyed I see. Strange that Sir Richard Stamford himself should have such an unconquerable aversion to visit the Manor!"

"Not strange at all," observed Julia,—"seeing that his wife killed herself within its walls—and that such a mass of misfortunes all fell upon the poor dear gentleman's head at the same moment. It would be far more strange if he thought of ever living here again. But I have cleared away the heap that you put aside to be burnt. Are there no more papers for the flames?"

"Patience, my dear—patience," said the ex-traveller. "I am not quite sure whether we have thoroughly examined this desk. It is an old fashioned piece of furniture—and there may be secret drawers, or what not."

"If there were, Sir Richard Stamford would have told you so," observed Julia. "But as he said nothing at all of the kind, you may be sure that there are none. Now, do make haste and leave of fiddling about with those little drawers. What is the use of pulling them all out in that manner?" she demanded impatiently.

"Because, my dear, I suspect that there is a secret recess in this piece of furniture," answered Page, in a mysterious tone. "Sir Richard Stamford may not know anything about it; but I am rather a shrewd and far-seeing man, my love—and the more I examine the arrangements of this desk, the more I am convinced that there is some curious contrivance about it. Look at the places into which these drawers fit: they don't go close up to the board at the back. That's quite clear! But here is a sort of false back—Hey-dey!" he suddenly exclaimed; and at the same moment that the ejaculation burst from his lips, the sharp, abrupt, clicking sound of a spring giving way startled his wife.

"What is it?" she demanded, hurrying close up to the desk.

"Just what I expected—and no more than I thought," responded Page, joyously. "A secret recess, my love—a private compartment, my dear!

"And he did not appear over well

Look--the false back to the desk has started out of its setting! Who was right in his suspicions--eh?"

And the ex-traveller chuckled with glee.

"Come--let us examine it," said Mrs. Page thrusting her hand into the recess: but she instantly drew it out again all covered over with the dust that had accumulated therein.

"By Jove! the secret compartment must have remained unused for a length of time!" exclaimed the ex-traveller. "Depend upon it, we are in luck's way! Our vocation seems to be the discovery of important documents regarding other people's business."

Thus speaking, Mr. Page tucked up his coat-sleeve and laced wristband, and thrust his hand into the recess.

"Papers, by jingo!" he exclaimed, drawing forth a bundle of letters much soiled by dust, and tied round with a faded riband. "But let us see whether there is any endorsement."

And having wiped off the dust, he approached the bundle to the lamp in such a manner that the light streamed full upon it. His wife looked over his shoulder; and their countenances expanded with a joy at the same moment, as their eyes deciphered the following lines written at the back of the letter which was uppermost in the packet:—

*Correspondence between Miss Hannah
Lightfoot and Lady Stamford:
together with Important Memoranda and
Explanatory Comments.
In the years 1757—1758.*

"That must be the former Lady Stamford--the wife of Sir William!" exclaimed Page. "Depend upon it, Julia my dear, these documents contain startling intelligence of some kind or other. Perhaps respecting the birth—"

At this moment the door of the library was opened and a man with his hat on and enveloped in a cloak, appeared upon the threshold.

Mr. Page and his wife turned their eyes upon him at the same instant: and simultaneously also did ejaculations of terror burst from their lips--while their features became convulsed with horror,—and the packet of papers fell from the hand of the ex-traveller.

For the countenance which thus met their startled, shuddering view and sent the blood with the chill of ice to their hearts, was that of Ramsey who

had been hung at the debtor's door of Newgate!

Could they be mistaken? No: another look convinced them that those indeed were the features so indelibly impressed upon their memories; and, with yet louder and wilder cries, they precipitated themselves from the room by a second door opening at the farther extremity.

Away they sped in total darkness along a passage; crash they came against a door, which the violence of the concussion forced open—a light streamed upon their eyes—a shriek saluted their ears—and from their own tongues thrilled the awful alarm of "A ghost! a ghost!"

CHAPTER CL.

ARRIVALS AT THE MANOR.

THE fact was that the room into which Mr. and Mrs. Page thus suddenly burst, was the one occupied by Mrs. Bryan and her husband, and where this worthy couple were at the moment partaking of a salubrious and frugal supper of bread and cheese, onions, and home-brewed ale. The shriek emanated from Mrs. Bryan, who was terribly startled at the violent and unceremonious manner in which the door was thrown open; and Mr. and Mrs. Page explained the cause of their own alarm by giving vent to the ejaculation of "A ghost! a ghost!"

Mr. Bryan, the gardener, who was an old man with a face as red and shrivelled as a wind-fall pippin, bounded from his seat—caught up the poker—and threw a fierce look around, as much as to imply that the ghost had better mind what it was about. His wife set up a piteous moaning, interspersed with such expressions as "Dearey me! dearey me" and "Lauk-a-day! what will become of us?"—while Mrs. Page sank exhausted upon a chair—and her husband cast a rapid and frightened look behind, to ascertain whether any hideous spectre was in pursuit of them.

But observing nothing, Mr. Page became a trifle more courageous; and, mustering up valour enough to shut the door, he said to the gardener, "Put down the poker my good man: the spirit has not followed us—and even if he had, it would be of no use to take up the fire-irons against him."

Mr. Bryan accordingly replaced the poker on the hearth, and resumed his seat,—saying, “What was it you thought you saw, sir?”

“Thought!” ejaculated Page, completely bewildered: “by heaven! there was no thinking in the matter! I am not inclined to superstition—I never believed in ghosts till now—but this adventure has altogether straggled me.”

And the ex-traveller began to pace the room in an agitated manner.

“What was it you saw, ma’am?” inquired the gardener, now appealing to Mr. Page for an explanation.

“Oh! don’t talk to me about it,” exclaimed Julia trembling violently from head to foot: “it makes me shudder merely to think of it.”

“Dearey me! dearey me!” moaned Mrs. Bryan, “rocking herself to and fro upon her seat: “what can it all mean! Leastways, what is it all about? If it was only a chimbley falling, we should have heard it—or a cat breaking a window——”

“No—it could not have been imagination!” cried Page, stopping suddenly short alike in his agitated walk and his bewildered reflections. “But let us put the matter to the test, Julia, my dear, what was it you thought you saw?”

“Ramsey, who was hanged,” replied the young woman, casting around looks of unspeakable terror.

“Exactly what I fancied!” exclaimed the extraveller, feeling that his flesh was creeping upon his bones and his blood running chill in his veins.

“Dearey me! dearey me!” moaned Mrs. Bryan more piteously than ever.

“The ghost of Ramsey as was hanged!” murmured the old gardener, with visible shudder.

“It was indeed!” said Page, in a musing tone: “and yet this is almost incredible. I am not superstitious, as I just now observed: but what can I think? Either that the fellow has come here again—or that his spirit haunts the place which is so closely connected with his crimes.”

And again did Mr. Page walk to and fro with nervous agitation visible in his manner and depicted upon his countenance.

You didn’t bring the papers away with you?” said Julia. *Those* papers—“I know which I mean,” she added significantly.

“No—I dropped them in the confusion of the moment,” answered

Page. But they are worth looking after—and, by Jove! I’ll venture back into the library, ghost or no ghost! Will anybody come with me?”

“Dearey me, not I!” ejaculated Mrs. Bryan: and looking towards her husband, she said, “Can’t you go with the gen’leman instead of sitting there like an old fool?”

“Yes—come with me,” said Page: “then tossing down a guinea upon the table, he observed. “There!—will that inspire you with courage, my good fellow?”

The gardener picked up the money—put it into his waistcoat pocket—and, rising slowly from his seat, intimated his readiness to follow the ex-traveller to the library.

Mrs. Page sat fast in her chair: and her husband did not think it worth while to solicit her company: but taking a candle from the table, he led the way along the passage, old Bryan keeping close to his heels.

On reaching the door whence he and his wife had so precipitately escaped from the library, Mr. Page perceived that it was wide open just as it had been left; and, summoning all his courage to his aid, he advanced to the threshold. The hurried and indeed fearful glance which he threw into the apartment, showed him in a moment that no one was there: and, considerably relieved, he entered with a comparatively firm step, the old gardener still following and gathering confidence from the fact that nothing terrible was to be seen.

Advancing towards the desk, Mr. Page looked anxiously about for the papers which he had discovered in the secret recess, and which contained the “correspondence between Miss Hannah Lightfoot and Lady Stamford:” but the packet was nowhere to be found. Vainly did he search amongst the documents scattered about—vainly did he go upon all fours and examine underneath the furniture: that particular collection of letters had disappeared!

“Well, this is most extraordinary!” muttered the bewildered Page to himself: “I am not so foolish as to imagine that a ghost would walk off with a parcel of papers! No—no—it was not a spirit—it was a living man—but whether Ramsey himself, resuscitated by some wondrous and unaccountable means, or a person as like him as two peas, it is impossible to determine. Perdition seize it!—the papers which would have

Perhaps made my fortune, have been snatched from my grasp!"

But scarcely had the ex-traveller reached this point in his musings, when he was suddenly interrupted by a loud knocking and ringing at the front door of the mansion.

"Who can that be?" exclaimed the old gardener. "Sir Richard perhaps—"

"No such thing!" cried Page. "The baronet is at Windsor, and will never set foot in this house again, I am very certain, after all that has happened. But come along—I will go with you to see who it is: for remember," he added with pompous self-sufficiency, "I represent Sir Richard Stamford during my brief sojourn beneath this roof,"

"Just as you like, sir," returned Bryan, who had no ambition to dispute the honour with the important, conceited, and bustling Mr. Page.

They accordingly hurried to the front door; and the moment it was opened, a lady and gentleman entered the hall without any ceremony. Mr. Page's eyes first sought the countenance of the former—for he was a great admirer of the fair sex; and the dazzling beauty which met his view completely rivetted his gaze for several moments. But on turning his looks upon the features of the gentleman to whose arm she clung, an ejaculation of mingled surprise and confusion burst from the lips of the ex-bagman: for he instantaneously recognised the Prince of Wales!

Meantime the gardener, fancying that he beheld his master Sir Richard Stamford, was making sundry awkward bows and pulling his forelock in token of respect: while the Prince himself, taking no notice whatsoever of the old man, kept his eyes fixed on Mr. Page, racking his memory to discover who he was. For the ex-traveller's features were quite familiar to his Royal Highness, who could not however for the life of him recollect at the moment where he had seen that thin, sallow, angular face before.

It was quite clear, however, to the Prince that he was recognised by this individual: and, not relishing the manner in which he was now being treated at; he said somewhat sharply, "What is your name, sir?—who are you?"

"My name is Page, at your Royal Highness's service," was the response: "and if your Royal Highness will re-

member a certain night at the George and Blue Boar——"

"Ah! by heaven! I recollect," cried the Prince, his face suddenly flushing with indignation: "you are the insolent scoundrel who dared to address me in a most familiar and presumptuous manner, and to follow me with a pertinacity as unaccountable as it was rude. What did you mean by it, sirrah?—and who are you?"

"I humbly beseech the pardon of your Royal Highness," said Mr. Page, bowing and scraping with the utmost deference: "but the little affair referred to, is easily explained. The truth is that at the time when the incident took place, a reward was offered for the apprehension of Sir Richard Stamford—and the extraordinary likeness which your Royal Highness bears to the baronet led me to mistake——"

"Oh! now I understand it all!" ejaculated the Prince, unable to suppress a laugh at Mr. Page's expense. "But I thought you were a commercial traveller? What are you doing at Stamford Manor?"

"I have retired from the 'the road,' may it please your Royal Highness," answered Page; "and having recently formed the acquaintance and now enjoying the friendship and confidence of Sir Richard Stamford——"

"After endeavouring to capture him for the sake of the reward—" exclaimed the Prince, darting a look of contempt on ex-bagman.

"Your Royal Highness must view my conduct harshly, with knowing all the particulars," said Page gravely. "It was I who enabled the baronet to escape from the custody in which certain villains held him—well as to prove his own innocence and bring Ramsey and Martin to the scaffold. For the present, I am Sir Richard's representative here—and if I can do anything to testify my devotion towards your Royal Highness——"

"Well, the truth is," interrupted the Prince, "I need the hospitality of this house to-night for myself and this lady," he added, glancing towards his lovely companion.

"Heavens! and I have kept your Royal Highness standing all this time in the hall—and the lady too!" ejaculated Page. "Deign to walk this way."

"And, throwing open a door at random—for, be it recollected, he himself was almost a complete stranger at the Manor—he stood bowing and scraping near the threshold while the Prince and the lady passed into the room, which happened to be the very one where a fire was already lighted and the supper-table laid in readiness for the behoof of the ex-bagman and Julia.

"Run and tell your wife—and my wife too," whispered Page hurriedly to the old gardener, "that the Prince of Wales and a lady are here, and that they must bustle about and get the best supper they can. Come—look alive!" added the ex-bagman sharply, seeing that Bryan was staring at him in stupid amazement.

Indeed, throughout the preceding dialogue between the Prince and Mr. Page, the oldman had stood in speechless wonder, gazing first at the former—then at the latter—and then at the

lady: for that conversation had made him aware of the astounding fact that it was not his master Sir Richard Stamford whom he saw before him, and on whom he had been lavishing his best bows and salutations—but a "Royal Highness"—a real, living, veritable "Royal Highness:"—and now he learnt, to his increased awe and amazement, that this personage was none other than the Prince of Wales, the heir-apparent to the British throne!

But upon being so sharply commanded by Mr. Page to "look alive," or Bryan felt as if he were suddenly galvanised into all the alacrity of his departed youthfulness: and hurrying off to the room where his wife and Mrs. Page were seated together conversing about the apparition of Ramsey, he communicated to them the startling intelligence that the Prince of Wales and a lady had sought the hospitality of Stamford Manor for the night.

END OF VOL. II.

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THE MYSTERY

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